

Remember Your Sins So God Can Forget Them!

⁶ Seek the Lord and live, or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire; it will devour them, and Bethel will have no one to quench it. ⁷ There are those who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground. ... ¹⁰ There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth. ¹¹ You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. ¹² For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. ¹³ Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil. ¹⁴ Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. ¹⁵ Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph. Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblia, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Are you forgetful? We all are. Every day information drains out of our minds as we forget things. Sometimes forgetfulness can be funny. Maybe you had a couple laughs over that time you ran out of gas or went to the wrong church for that wedding. Other times forgetfulness can be costly like the time you forgot to pay your credit card bill and got charged interest or you forgot to feed the fish who are now floating upside down in the tank. Other times forgetfulness can be dangerous. The “do-it-yourselfer” who forgets to turn off the electricity while changing out that outlet may be in store for a shock, or if you forget to check left while turning right on a red light could lead to a serious crash.

We need reminders. And we need reminders when it comes to our sin, too. Yes, we know and are glad our sins are forgiven. They are as far away from us as the east is from the west. There is nothing better than telling someone to stop feeling guilty. God has forgotten their sins in Christ. That is the whole purpose of this church, to use the keys and unlock heaven to folks as we forgive sins.

That is all true. But what happens if we forget that we still sin? Like a driver nodding at the wheel, we are in danger of falling into spiritual slumber and slip and fall from saving grace. That is the whole point of our Old Testament reading for today. God wants us to remember our sins now so he can forget them forever.

I. The downward drag of our sins.

Here are the headlines. Widespread crime. The rich get richer and more powerful. The poor still have to pay their taxes and then watch how the market is manipulated so they don't get a fair price for their goods or pay more for what they buy. Businesses taking advantage of workers and customers. In fact, businesses are so competitive for every dollar that they are open over holidays. The family unit is broken and there is widespread immorality.

Sounds like headlines today. But these are headlines from the days of Amos. ⁷ **There are those who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground. ... ¹⁰ There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth. ¹¹ You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. ... There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. ¹³ Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil.** I guess there will never be a time when things are fair. Bribery, the rich able to afford the lawyers to always get them off, a justice system that charges the law abiding citizen and lets the lawbreaker off, corruption at all levels, riots unchecked, all leading to bitterness and cynicism. Those who are fair and just, those who are offended by all that is going on, are afraid to speak up because they put a target on their own backs. The times are that bad.

These are the sins Amos pointed out when God called him to be a prophet to the ten northern tribes of Israel. What is sad about all of this is the fact that they went to church frequently. They made their sacrifices, they gave their 10%, they said the prayers. Do you see the hypocrisy here? **“I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies.”** Their worship was empty. The songs they sang in church were not pleasing to God. The offerings they made were disgusting. Their church services disgusted him. It would be like a close relative stealing money from you to buy you a present. That present means nothing.

What would you do if people cheated you? You probably sue them. You would demand laws are made to prevent such corruption. You'd report them to the authorities and demand that they be punished. What does God do? He calls them to repentance. That is why he called Amos, a farmer and rancher, to go up those people. ⁶ **Seek the Lord and live, or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire; it will devour them, and Bethel will have no one to quench it. ... ¹⁴ Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. ¹⁵ Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.** God will punish them. They deserve it. But he doesn't want punishment; he wants mercy.

This is what God wants. He wants each sinner to return to him and be saved. This is called repentance, that turning around the sinner. God does this by showing us that we are going in the wrong direction. He will remind us of our sins. We need this. Even

church going sinners can forget their sins. The people in Amos' book did. You see what happens when we forget we sin each day. It would be like some nasty winter weather. It is snowing. The wind is blowing the snow to near white out conditions. The roads are slick with black ice or packed down snow. You drive along and you see car after car in the ditch. You criticize them for not driving cautiously. The problem is, you are going 65 miles per hour and it is just a matter of time before you lose it on that next curve and ditch yourself.

Yes, they are committing sins out there. It is so bad we are afraid to say anything. But we are still committing sins, too. We will until heaven. And if we forget that, we will soon find ourselves crashing into that ditch as well.

So it is good we remember that children of God like us are still sinners living in a sinful world. That is why God in every book of the Bible reminds us that we are still sinners. He wants us to remember our sins so he can forget them.

II. The Lord saves us from our sins.

If I told you right now to dial 911, you wouldn't do it. You would ask why. Someone can go up to a sinner and say, "Believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior," and he would ask, "Why should I?" But if I told you your house is on fire and to dial 911, you would do it before I can finish the sentence. Likewise, the sinner who sees his life on fire from sin understands he needs help. Suddenly the words, "Believe in Jesus and you will not perish but have everlasting life," mean something. The folks in the days of Amos didn't see their sin even though it was out there in view of everyone. As a result they didn't need a Savior or God. And God surely noticed it. **"Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. ¹² For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins."** God will remember them if we don't.

So remember your sins now. At the end of the day I check over my "to do" list for the day to see what I got done and left undone. When we speak of daily repentance, it is much the same thing. I found what Luther wrote in connection with the ministry of the keys to be helpful. He asks the question, "*How can we recognize these sins?*" Then he writes: "Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, employer, or employee? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you hurt anyone by word or deed? Have you been dishonest, careless, wasteful, or done other wrong?" So ask yourself those questions every day, not just on Sunday. In fact, if there is an argument or frustration or anything, pause and evaluate what you said or did.

So, remember your sins now, and when you do, what will you find? **"Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph."** We find mercy. We find forgiveness. God doesn't base his forgiveness on the fact we confess our sins. He doesn't forgive because that person cried and this one didn't. He forgives solely because Jesus died for our sins. A neighbor could lament how he has medical bills for \$150,000. You feel sorry for him, but what can you do if you don't have \$150,000? God has mercy on us, but he backs up his mercy with action. He gave up his Son on the cross as payment for our sins.

This is why remembering our sins is good for us. They tell us the house is on fire so we dial 911. **"⁶ Seek the Lord and live,"** he promises us. We will live forever.

But that isn't the only thing we seek. **"¹⁴ Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. ¹⁵ Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph."** Again, it is like driving during that blizzard. You see cars in the ditch. This is a reminder to slow down yourself so you don't do the same thing. In fact, you might even stop to see if there is a stranded motorist who needs your help. We seek God for forgiveness so we live. We now seek good so we live by not falling away or ditching ourselves again. We do this by hating evil, loving good, being fair and kind; submitting to others; being humble. In essence, loving your neighbor as yourself. You can't keep all sin out of your life. But you can keep it from being your life.

So, what do you want? To forget sin now only to have God remember it when you stand before him? Or to remember it now to have God forget it then? God wants to forget your sin. He can because of Jesus. Let him for he promises, **"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."** Amen.