

## Forgiven Regrets

Life is what happens long before you realize that it has. What we experience is like something ingested; its nutritional value is only later discovered after it is digested. And what if it is poisonous! It means nothing to avow, "I shouldn't have eaten it!"

I have in retrospect discovered that I had done things in my earlier years that I now regret in old age. But at the time, I would have denied that my actions were the foolish inventions of a younger mind. In those earlier days I thought I was near sainthood. But upon review either I have uncovered a darker side to my nature that lay hidden from a younger me or interpreting memories is an art I have yet to master. Perhaps, God wisely decided not to point out every little flaw in my character all at once, lest I become discouraged "beyond measure." So maybe my regrets are themselves regrettable. Maybe God has led me past unseen dangers. What I imagine as the foolish exploits of an immature *me* were only God's opportunity to reveal my undeniable need of *Him*.

This is the part of the story of all our yesteryears that will never be written because we cannot be sure what really happened or whether it needed to happen in the course of growing up. Which memories are regrettable? Which memories are testimonies to God's mercies? What part of the past needs to be *confessed* and forgiven? And what part should be *professed* as intervening grace? In the New Testament a single word means both: confession and profession. The context decides. So, what is the context of our memories—both fondest and most regrettable! Which memories are not memories at all but a strange admixture of uninterpreted dreams and the devil's accusing lies? How much can we in old age trust our thoughts, especially when they cannot be shared with anyone because we alone think them? And whereas some would compare their own past to another of a disreputable sort to assuage wounded pride, these are private reflections that by their very nature must not seek the false comfort of another.

Should I write all this down? People write autobiographies but they cannot be otherwise than bias. How much has been left unsaid? How much of a person's past bears the weight of future consequences that should be reconciled but are not? How much is just so much self-praise with no healing value for the soul? How much cannot be recalled, a selective amnesia, because the pain could not otherwise be born? Could such an autobiography be cathartic—a breakthrough to self-forgiveness? An honest confession of a past that needs to be reconciled with the present in order to bring one to a place of inner peace? A prayerful recollection might be God's means of putting all these regrets to rest!

Or is regret possibly a form of self-flagellation, purposely denying one's own happiness, because they think they do not deserve happiness? They think they do not deserve to be forgiven? Whether or not their memories are true is no longer at issue because there seems sufficient cause in an imperfect life to punish themselves. If God won't, they will! Somehow this is justice gratified—not justice satisfied.

Then again, perhaps, *we* may have been wrong. We may have been living with the memory of offending another while they do not remember the offense. A sharp tongue only nicked them and they have long since healed. Or maybe they simply never found reason to blame us; but we blame ourselves! Or maybe, unknown to us, we have been already forgiven. This might have been good to know, but the distance of years made this impossible: nothing to forgive; nothing to forget. But, alas, this is not how some of us see it, and perhaps, that's regrettable, too.

Then there is God's forgiveness which is a powerful revelation. Once we realize how complete and lasting is His forgiveness, His love for us, we find out that for Him, our past no longer exists. It just remains that we forgive ourselves, too.