

THE LORD DOES NOT REMEMBER

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Think of how a burglar must feel, at the end of the year, if he has been caught and put in prison, and has there decided that he is going to change his ways. Let us say that two years ago he was stealing things from someone's house, and the police caught him, and took him to jail. Then all the people he knew found out that he was a burglar, because before that a lot of them thought he was an ordinary person. He was brought before the courts, and sent to prison for a year.

While he was in prison he decided that he was really going to turn away from his bad life, and live a good one, and he is now longing for the day when he can get out, and start that new life. Now think how he must feel as he looks back on the last year. He remembers the times he used to sneak into a house that was empty and take away the things of other people. He remembers, perhaps, how upset the people must have been when they came home and found their things gone. And he feels ashamed of himself. Then he thinks about the time he was caught, and how terribly ashamed he was when the policeman took him to jail. And then he remembers how his friends looked at him when they realized that he had been doing such bad things all along, and he could almost die of shame. He realizes fully now how bad he has been, and longs to be able to live a good life again.

Now, none of you are burglars. But each one of us, too, ought to look back over the year, and think of the things we have done. As we do this, we will probably find things which will make us feel pleased—things we have done well at. And when we see these things, we ought to be thankful to the Lord for making us able to do these things. But we also will find things that we are not proud of - perhaps even things we are ashamed of. A boy might remember times when he was nasty to his brother, wouldn't let him play at games with his friends, took pleasure in stopping him from enjoying himself when his parents weren't around. A younger brother might remember times when he's tried to get his big brother into trouble. Children might remember the times when they had not told the truth, and feel ashamed that they were too scared to be honest. They might remember times when they gave in to being greedy, and took more sweets or cakes than was their share, so the other children had less. If they think back on these things, perhaps they will be ashamed, and decide that next year they won't do these things. After all, no one wants people to think that they're cruel, take more than their share, are greedy, or that they are liars. They would feel terrible if people thought this. Perhaps they even realize that it would be terrible if the Lord thought this way about them.

Now let us think about that burglar again. He is waiting to come out of prison and start a good life. But he knows that lots of people will remember the bad things he has done, and they won't trust him, won't want to give him work, and won't want to have anything to do with him. He knows it's going to take a long time before people will forget what he has done and some unforgiving people will never forget.

So with us. If we do bad things, people will begin to say: that person is a bully, or, that they are not truthful; and it takes a long time before people realize, that they try to do better, then they've really changed.

But one thing we can be sure of, and that is that the moment we decide to what is right, and really decide to do it, there is one person who starts to forget. That is the Lord. He knows, after all, all the wrong things that we have ever done. But the Lord loves us. He has no joy in remembering our bad things. All the Lord wants is that each one of us turn to good. He doesn't want to pay us out for the evil we have done, He only wants to turn us to the good. And so, the moment that burglar sitting in prison decided in his heart that he was going to be good, the Lord began to take no notice of all the bad things he had done before. He doesn't forget them altogether, but He doesn't notice them any more; and He doesn't punish the burglar for them.

This is a very happy thought. The moment a person wants to do what is good, the Lord then no longer notices all the bad things they have done. He makes it as if they had never happened! That was what He tried to tell us when He said that if our sins had been as scarlet, they would be white as snow: if we had done terrible things, and then turned from them, He would wipe those sins out.

Zaccheus the publican had been an evil man, you know. He had taken money that didn't belong to him, and so he was in a way a thief. But the very day that he told the Lord he was going to follow Him, what did the Lord say? He said: "This day is salvation come to this house." In other words: I will forgive Zaccheus this very day.

So as we look forward to another year, it is good to look backwards too, and see what we have done that is wrong, and be ashamed of it if we need to be. Then we can say to ourselves, I am going to change, and stop doing those things. And we can be sure that, right away, the Lord will stop noticing those evils. He won't blame us for them. If we go back and do them again, that's different: then He can't help noticing them. But if we're firm in not doing them any more, then the Lord forgets them. He never brings them to mind, and never punishes us for them. And in time all people will forget those things which we have done, and we need never be ashamed of them any longer. *Amen.*