

## Will God Shred the Evidence?

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Remember the “Irangate” hearings? Those wide-reported investigations into the “Arms for hostages” deal that was supposed to take the Ayatollah’s money to help fund the Nicaraguan “contras”? A high-profile example of that desire to hide, to cover-up, to conceal the truth. A vivid demonstration of the lengths some people will go to destroy the proof of what really happened. Missing letters. Memos smuggled out in a secretary’s boot. And above all, a hyperactive shredding machine!

How we want to make embarrassing things go away. Make like they never happened. Make them disappear with the wave of some magic wand.

How we want our most intimately embarrassing moments of ego-crunching sin totally vaporized so that we can rest easy in our beds, knowing that they can never come back to haunt us. How more than anything else want God to suffer a severe case of divine amnesia when our “cases” come up!

After all, God does say that He will remember our sins no more, He will cast them into the deepest sea, and that all the former things will pass away. But how, what, and why?

For many Christians, this “sin-forgetting” is a most attractive doctrine. We won’t need to worry in heaven, because no-one, not even God, will remember what we got up to, since all record of those embarrassing moments will have been forever purged from the books. The slate is wiped clean. The sin-tape is fully erased. Forgiven, and forgotten, so the idea goes. [Besides if we could still remember sin in heaven, that would cause us pain and grief. And we couldn’t be sad in heaven, could we?]

But is it true? In the end, will God shred the evidence that has been assembled at such tremendous cost? After all, if the evidence is unimportant then why didn’t God terminate sin at its source? Why allow time for sin to spread and develop? Surely for this one vital reason: to show what sin really is. In this way God demonstrates to all his created beings that he is right, that Satan, the originator of sin, is wrong—and that in resolving this cosmic conflict God has always been true to his actual nature. The supreme part of this evidence is God himself—Jesus dying on the cross.

And in order to safeguard the future of the universe from future “wrong choices” then every being must have a graphic conception of what sin is, and where that road leads. The only alternative would be for God to take away free choice—that one very essential that he has been working to preserve and encourage all along! The only reason why God can say that the curse will not arise a second time is because he knows that no-one will ever choose that route again—because of the evidence.

So what of God’s (and our) remembrance of sin? Is he still somehow going to hold it against us, like some infernal sword of Damocles ready to be dropped on us at any suitable moment? Or will someone come up to us in the hereafter and remind us of some choice misdemeanor that we had

thought was forever obliterated? Heavenly gossip? Surely all such thoughts reflect some very perverted views of God and heaven! [Nor can we say that some consciousness of sadness won't remain with us. After all, the Holy Spirit grieves and God weeps now. Won't the Godhead remember that in the future? It's how we remember that counts.]

But let's take seriously the whole concept of sin revelation? For is it not true that "every hidden thing shall be revealed." Won't we be severely embarrassed? Mortified in the presence of our Christian friends? Shamed before our family? We each have hidden sins we would never want anyone to know about. Surely God won't make a public spectacle of us to humiliate and degrade us?

How will it be?

Ever take a penny from your mother's purse when you were a kid? Still ashamed to admit that now? Hardly. Not that sin can in any way be excused or condoned—even our "little" sins. But, as we would quickly say, "that was when I was small. I've grown up since then!" We have "put away childish things" and we can look back without so much painful guilt. And surely, if we are following our Lord, we can honestly look back and see how he has led us on the way, and how he is still working with us. We need to remain conscious of our own sinfulness, but we also need to be able to see our developing lives against the backdrop of eternity.

Our sins are part of the evidence. God is not going to shred the evidence. He does not hold them against us, and he will not use them to embarrass or denigrate us in any way. But in the same way that the marks of the Cross will remain in Jesus' glorified body as a reminder of what he did, so too our consciousness of our sinful actions will remind us of what sin is, and what it led to. Without that we would not be secure. Safety, even in heaven, only comes from being completely assured about the trustworthiness of God. Being perfect will not help—for angelic perfection failed right there in heaven. The highest created being, who had access to far more truth about God, far more knowledge and power, decided to go his own way. Sin is that most basic of all distrusts—distrusting God, his nature, and his government.

But our relationship to what we have done will then be very different. We will understand far more. We will look on our earthly history from the vantage point of heaven's eternity. We will all have similar experiences—and so no-one will be able to feel superior, nor would they even want to! Most of all we see through God's eyes: a wider perspective. We see the way in which he has brought us through, how he has changed us, how he has healed us from all of sin's terrible damage. Only as we have some continuity of thought of the meaning of sin can this be real. Only as we understand what it cost God to restore us to himself are we safe. And only as we agree with God that right is right for its own sake will the universe be forever secure.

After all he's done to gather the proof, God is not about to destroy it! Would God shred the Bible, which contains so many details of individual sin? Do the Bibles go down the garbage disposal as soon as we enter heaven? No. Our safety lies not in divine amnesia, but in the kind of person God really is. We shall not need to or want him to forget what we have done. We only need to know that we shall never ever want to do such things again. To be forgiven is not enough—we must also be changed. And our God promises just that, and so we have no need to be afraid of him—or anyone

else in the kingdom—knowing our most intimate guilty secrets. For our God and all who follow him are totally trustworthy.

Our gracious God will never shred the evidence! What a tremendous promise!

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