

THE SCARLET LETTER

Recently, my wife, Tricia and I watched and enjoyed two movie versions of the interesting and informative, nineteenth century novel “The Scarlet Letter” which was written by American author Nathaniel Hawthorne. I read the novel last year and I would highly recommend it to virtually all age groups from teenage up.

In this article, I would like to link this story with the Feast of Unleavened Bread and to focus on some of the good, strong lessons we can learn from them both.

But first, let me ask: What is pictured by the seventh and last Day of Unleavened Bread which, unfairly perhaps, tends to be somewhat overshadowed by the busy-ness of the pre-Passover season, the Passover itself, the Night to be Much Observed, and the First Day of Unleavened Bread? We think of the number seven in the Bible as being the number of spiritual perfection and completion. We are taught by God that, before and during this season, we are to think a lot about sin. So, on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread we have been traditionally led to think of:

- The children of Israel coming *completely* out of Egypt,
- The people of God’s church coming *completely* out of sin,
- Coming *completely* out of Satan’s world,
- Our *complete* rejection of sin.

These are all very good topics to focus on when we celebrate this special day each year. But there are some others which I would like to home in upon in this article:

- The *complete* forgiveness of our sins by God,
- His *complete* forgetting of our sins.

Adultery and fornication

The story of “The Scarlet Letter” – thought to have been based upon actual events, the details of which Hawthorne had unearthed in some dusty old records – is set in seventeenth century New England, where a young woman by the name of Hester Prynne is publicly tried, pilloried, shamed and imprisoned by a Puritan court for her sin and crime of adultery. Hester has an additional penalty inflicted upon her, however as she is condemned to wear a large embroidered, red letter “A” on the front of her dress whenever she ventures out in public. The letter “A,” of course, stands for “Adulteress.” This additional, continuing punishment is meant to shame her perpetually and to frighten others into avoiding committing this same sin.

Nowhere in his book does Hawthorne condone the sin of adultery. He does, however, effectively expose the equally sinful hypocrisy of Hester's self-appointed, unofficial, self-righteous critics and gossips, as well as the lack of Christian mercy on behalf of her judges.

But how does this story apply to God's church today? We do not live in seventeenth century Puritan America. We live in the bustling twenty-first century, and today's immoral world generally cares little about the twin sins of adultery and fornication. Still, if a woman has a baby out of wedlock, for the few who *do* care, these particular sins carry some obvious, built-in penalties and shame.

A few weeks ago, the parents and the young people of our Victoria congregation viewed the United Church of God's startling DVD presentation, "Sex Has a Price Tag" by the internationally-acclaimed family and crisis counselor, Pam Stenzel. We were all shocked as to how very behind the times we had been regarding the myriad, horrible dangers of extra-marital sexual activity.

Despite their many dangers, adultery and fornication are fundamentally no worse than any other sin any of us might commit. With the evidence of the young mother's expanded waistline and the eventual, resultant infant, the results are just more obvious than most others! These built-in "signs" negate the need for the mother of a child born out of wedlock to have to endure the added shame of wearing a large, red letter "A" or "F" on her bosom.

Again, the sins of a fornicator or an adulteress and her partner – the adulterer – are really no worse than any other sin; for example, the sins of gossip or lack of mercy. We may not have committed the sins of adultery or fornication (or we may not *think* we have), but how would we like to be forced to wear the letter "G" because we habitually gossip? Or the letter "M" because we lack true Christian mercy and are thus branded as "Merciless"?

But such sins are small compared with immorality, are they not? No, they are not! To God there is no such thing as a "small sin," in the same way as there is no such thing as a "white lie." Sin is sin! And every single sin has contributed to the death of Jesus Christ. Yes, every sin, whether it be pre-marital or extra-marital sexual activity, mass murder, lack of mercy, or a seemingly harmless gossip session.

All done it?

At this point I would like to emphasize that it is not my wish to pick on the sins of adultery and fornication specifically, but just to use them as cases in point.

Some time ago, I was talking with the mother of a young man who had sired a child out of wedlock. Nine months of pregnancy and a cute new baby made it obvious to everyone that he and his girlfriend had committed the sin of fornication.

During our conversation, I was shocked by one observation from the young man's mother. I do not know whether it was just a side-comment or whether she had thought her words out in advance, but, after telling me of the pregnancy, she said, almost as an aside, "Yes. But we've all done it, haven't we?"

My first astonished reaction was to answer with a resounding, "No! We *have not* all done it! We have not all had pre-marital sex! We have not all fathered or borne what used to be termed 'illegitimate children'!"

Despite my amazement, and trying hard to exercise diplomacy, I merely answered her comment with a neutral clearing of the throat. However, I kept this new grandmother's observation in my heart and I thought very much about it during the following months. As I explored my thoughts on her comment, I began to remember Jesus' admonitions, and I eventually came to realize how right the young man's mother was and how wrong and how self-righteous I had been:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

What mature human being – except Jesus Himself, of course – has never lusted after a member of opposite sex? Even if only a little?

What? *Only* a little? *Just* a little? Have we not already established that, to God, there are no little sins? We know very well, by the arrival of the Last Day of Unleavened Bread each year, that even a little leaven leavens the whole lump (I Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9).

Cast the first stone!

One of the best-known scriptural examples of sexual immorality is the one recorded in John chapter 8:

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. (John 8:1-8)

Did you ever wonder what Jesus was writing on the ground?... In the dust?

Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (Verses 9 to 11)

Just like Hester Prynne's Puritan magistrates in "The Scarlet Letter," these scribes and Pharisees were exposed by Jesus as merciless, self-appointed, self-righteous judges.

Yes, these scribes and Pharisees surely were self-righteous. But were they really righteous? Truly righteous? Jesus knew they were not. And *they* knew they were not!

Again, what did Jesus write in dust with His finger? We do not know for sure, of course. But we may speculate. Was He perhaps jotting down times? Dates? Names? Places? Of the woman's accusers' sins, perhaps? Perhaps sexual sins? Possibly of encounters with this very same woman?

Did you ever ask yourself: How did this woman's accusers know exactly where and when to catch her in adultery? And what about her partner? Why did he get off so lightly? If they caught her, surely they must have caught *him* at the same time. So why was he not also dragged into the temple, and before Jesus? Was the adulterer somehow not as guilty as the adulteress? Was his sin somehow not as great as hers? Perhaps he was a crony of the scribes and Pharisees. Perhaps the whole episode was staged, as might be implied by verse 6, in their efforts to trap Jesus:

This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him.

Again, please do not misunderstand me. Let me repeat that I am not picking on those who have fathered or borne children out of wedlock. But neither am I condoning adultery or fornication. There is no doubt at all that both activities are sins. Like the author of "The Scarlet Letter," Jesus Christ – the same YHWH who engraved the seventh commandment into the tablet of stone, possibly with the same finger with which He wrote in the dust of the temple grounds – does not condone sins of fornication or adultery. He thunders out His command to all generations:

Thou shalt not commit adultery. (Exodus 20:14)

Although Jesus exercised great compassion on the adulteress that day, He also warned her very firmly, "Go, and sin no more!"

What about fornication – pre-marital sexual activity? Is it any less sinful than adultery? Not at all! Through the apostle Paul, God repeatedly commands His people – perhaps especially the young people of His church:

- Flee fornication! (I Corinthians 6:18)
- Avoid fornication! (I Corinthians 7:2)
- Let fornication not be once named among you! (Ephesians 5:3)
- Abstain from fornication! (I Thessalonians 4:3)

After reviewing these well-known scriptures and others, and after thinking and praying much more about these things, I was led to the conclusion that that young man's mother was right! We *have* all done it! We never talk about it. We do not like to even *think* about it. But it is nonetheless true! From God's point of view, if we have lusted, then we have thought about it. And if we have thought about it, then we have as good as done it! All of us! I will admit that I have done it! And if you are honest with yourself, you too will admit it – not to me or to anyone else, but between you and God – that you have done it too. Hopefully, we have all repented of our sins of fornication and adultery, whether committed in body or in thought.

Sins made public?

Referring back to “The Scarlet Letter,” it is probable that the Puritans took their authority for their harsh stance on the public shaming of adulterers from scriptures such as these:

For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:14)

Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. (Matthew 10:26)

For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. (Mark 4:22)

For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops. (Luke 12:2-3)

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. (I Corinthians 4:5)

More questions come to mind as a result of reading these well-known scriptures. Some of the questions are quite disturbing. For example:

- Is it fair and right that one’s sins be made public by fallible, human, ecclesiastical courts or church councils?
- Does any man – any fellow sinner – have the right to make our sins public?
- Will God make our sins public at the return of Jesus Christ?

The answer to the first two questions is quite obvious: No! And the answer to the last of the three questions is both simple and comforting: God *will not* reveal what He has forgiven, and He *cannot* reveal what He has forgotten. Yes, forgotten! Let us explore this concept a little.

On at least two occasions, David, in a repentant attitude, begged God to forget his sins:

Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Your mercy remember me, for Your goodness’ sake, O LORD. (Psalms 25:7)

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions... Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. (Psalm 51: 1, 9)

Were David's earnest requests mere wishful thinking? Not at all. Also, is God like those cruel, unforgiving scribes, Pharisees and Puritans we have been discussing? No. Of course He is not. We well know that He is infinitely forgiving, loving and merciful.

But He does require repentance. He wants – no, He demands – of His children a real, sincere change of direction. Then He will forgive us:

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. (Isaiah 1:16-18)

In the same way as we human parents will happily forgive an errant child if he or she shows real fruits of change, if we will truly repent, then God will gladly forgive our sins, and will even forget them. Though our former sins were glaring like letters and words boldly written in brilliant red ink on a white page, upon our sincere repentance, the shed blood of Jesus Christ blots out and completely covers them. Those words, symbolically written in scarlet ink, which detail our sins and our guilt, then become like invisible ink which is designed to turn white and to totally disappear:

I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25)

"No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," says the LORD. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jeremiah 31:34)

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. (Hebrews 8:12)

Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. (Hebrews 10:17)

Because of our sins, we are all guilty of the death of our Elder Brother – the Son of God. But our loving Father tells us again and again that if we will repent of our sins,

He is so very willing to forgive them. Yes, and even to forget them! To totally blot them out of His perfect memory, just as though we had never committed them!

Have you ever erased a favourite audio tape and wished that you had not? You fast-forward through the tape in the desperate hope that its contents are still somehow there. But all you hear is total silence! The tape is blank! Or you computer users, have you ever erased an important file by mistake and you have not able to retrieve it? You search and search in the vain hope that your file is still hiding somewhere on your hard disk. But alas, no! Even 'Norton Utilities' will not bring it back. It is gone forever! These two common illustrations picture how totally and completely God is willing to forgive and forget the sins of His children, if and when we sincerely repent.

Yes. When God decides to forgive and forget our sins, they are *completely* gone out of His perfect memory. But He did not lose them by some mistake. He forced them out of His memory. *He* erased them. On purpose!

Leave it behind

To a certain degree, we are to emulate God in His forgetting of our sins. If you have sincerely repented of a sin, you should not keep dragging it back up and beating yourself up over it. When God has forgiven and forgotten it, so should you – but with a certain qualification, which we will come to presently.

As mentioned earlier, one of the lessons of the Last Day of Unleavened Bread is that we must come out of sin *completely*. We believe that the ancient Israelites marched through the Red Sea on that very Feast day. When they were faced with this vast barrier of salt water, and, even after God had miraculously taken them through that huge obstacle, every time they faced other difficulties, what did they do? Did they fall down before their great God? After all, had they not seen the working of His mighty hand over and over again? Did they humbly plead with Him for the help they needed?

No. They did not. The response of so many of them to every trial and difficulty was a vocal, burning desire to go back to Egypt. Let us take a little time and space to study this Israelite proclivity:

Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." (Exodus 13:17)

We see here that God knew in advance of the tests He planned to put them through that they would react this way.

Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?' For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness." (Exodus 14:11-12)

And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." (Exodus 16:3)

As slaves in Egypt, had they *really* enjoyed such a fine diet? And did they *really* believe that God had taken the time and effort to bring them out of Egypt just to kill them in the wilderness? It appears that their memories and their logic may have been perverted by their apparent hunger! After this, God decided to give them another test – this time, a trial of thirst:

And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" (Exodus 17:3)

I have often wondered about the mention of livestock in this and other similar verses. If the Israelites owned cattle, sheep and goats, could they *really* have suffered from the level of hunger they complained of in other passages, such as this one in Numbers 11:4-6?:

Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"

Here we read of another example of those perverted Israelite memories! Notice, as well, how they despised the miraculous manna, as well as the God who sent it and whom it symbolized (Deuteronomy 8:3; John 6:31).

Then you shall say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt." Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you,

and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?" (Numbers 11:18-20)

Again, we see how the ungrateful Israelites proved to God how much they despised Him.

So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader [KJV: captain] and return to Egypt." (Numbers 14:1-4)

Our short-sighted, logic-challenged forebears rejected their true Captain (Hebrews) and sought another who would lead them back to Egypt, to slavery and to probable death!

Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there. Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink." (Numbers 20:1-5)

This "evil place" as the Israelites so foolishly and inaccurately described it was Kadesh-Barnea which means "the holy place in the desert." Why was it holy? Because it was the gathering place – the jumping-off point – for their final entry into the Promised Land. But because of their faithless attitudes, God turned this generation of Israelites back from completion of their goal. Is it not ironic, seeing that they desired Egypt so much, that God actually sent them back from Kadesh in that general direction. Of course, He did not allow them to get all the way to Egypt, but caused them to wander in the wilderness for forty long years.

Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." (Numbers 21:4-5)

What depths of folly could these people sink to? Did they not realize that it was their own murmuring that had caused them to remain in the wilderness? And how could they so openly loathe the wonderful manna which God miraculously sent them each day – this “bread” that represented Christ Himself?

And you complained in your tents, and said, ‘Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. (Deuteronomy 1:27)

These ridiculous accusations are like the totally untruthful and unreasonable ramblings one might expect of the mentally deranged!

When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’ (Deuteronomy 17:15-16)

Even after their time of wandering was over, when they were settled in their new land, God, looking hundreds of years into the future to the time of their first human king, knew that that there would still be a strong inclination amongst the Israelites to want to go back to Egypt. Like a huge electro-magnet, Egypt held such a very strong attraction to them. These fickle Israelites expressed their desire over and over again to go back to their previous miserable lives of slavery. As we have seen in these scriptures, both their memories and their logic were very faulty. They were like certain young girls of our modern era who, after having been kidnapped, defend, support and say kind things about their former abusers.

It has been said before that God had no trouble getting the Israelites out of Egypt, but that He had some major trouble getting Egypt out of the Israelites! God wanted them to forget Egypt which, as we well know, symbolizes sin. He wanted them to put Egypt completely behind them. In the same way, He wants His New Testament children – the present-day Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) – to put our sins behind us. But the Israelites insisted on remembering their lives in Egypt. Or rather they remembered their own twisted, inaccurate versions of it. They just would not let those memories go!

Are we not the same as our Israelite forefathers in some respects? God is very desirous to forgive our sins and to completely forget them when we repent. He forgets them and puts them completely in the past. But we keep dredging them up! We do this in two different ways. First, we might recall the sin, allowing ourselves to be re-tempted, to like the idea of that particular sin again, and then to foolishly re-

commit it. Secondly, we might keep dragging up the memory of some sin, and keep beating ourselves up over it again and again; just as though God had not forgiven and forgotten it as He promised.

Preventative remembering

All of the things we have discussed so far do not mean that we can take lightly the seriousness of our sins or the greatness of God's mercy. We must beware, once again, of throwing the baby out with the bath-water! In this regard then, it is healthy for us to keep a basic memory of our former sins in the backs of our minds.

Many will remember the 1970 movie, "Love Story," a tear-jerker of a film, unfortunately and unnecessarily laced with bad language. Its famous sub-title which has survived these thirty-five years surprisingly well proclaims that, "Love means never having to say you're sorry." Although it sounds very nice and so poetically romantic, this saying is absolute, anti-God rubbish! Love and law go hand in hand. Every time God's law is broken, a sin is committed. And whenever sin is committed, sincere remorse, confession and repentance become necessary.

True, sincere repentance is the key. But true, sincere repentance is more than just saying "I'm sorry." Being sorry is only one small part of the repentance process. It is only the first necessary step. True and total repentance is a *complete* turning around and walking 180 degrees away from sin. It is actively, purposefully, continuously walking in the opposite direction, just like the Israelites walking through the Red Sea and away from Egypt. No. Not walking. Running! Running to get as far away as possible and as quickly as possible from that wretched Egypt of sin. Allow me to refer to just one more movie. In Cecil B. De Mille's 1956 epic, "The Ten Commandments," there is a somewhat humorous scene as the Israelites are shown near the completion of their walk through the Red Sea, with the huge walls of water still towering on each side of them. As they approach the distant shore, we are caused to focus on one woman who turns around to see that the whole Egyptian army has pursued the Israelites into dry bed of the Red Sea. This woman does what we would all probably do, I am sure. She screams, "Aaagghh!" and she immediately stops walking, and starts running. Running for her life!

This Israelite woman did not do anything wrong. On the contrary, she did what was right. Once she recognized the potential grave danger, she immediately took corrective action. We must do the same. We must recognize danger of spiritual Egypt and its wicked leader. We must not just walk away from them. We must run! Like young Joseph, when he fled from the advances of Potiphar's adulterous wife, we too must flee (Genesis 39:7-12). We too must run as fast as we possibly can from fornication, adultery, and from all other sin.

Emulate God

As we have seen, God is so willing and eager to forgive and forget our sins; we too should emulate His great mercy by forgiving and forgetting the sins of our fellows against us. Actually, their sins are not really against us, are they? Sin is the transgression of *God's* law, not ours!

Before the Passover, we were commanded to examine ourselves. Self-examination is just that... self-examination! This is such an obvious statement, but it is one that we should think carefully about. Self-examination is not the examination or accusation of others. We must beware of pointing our fingers of judgment, and we must concentrate on our *own* sins. Allow me to repeat the old, well-worn illustration that whenever a person points his finger of judgment at others, there are three other fingers pointing right back at him!

Also, if we self-righteously point the finger of accusation at our brethren, then we are not imitating our just and merciful God. Instead, we are emulating Satan, the accuser of our brethren (Revelation 12:10). Rather, let us heed this instruction from the One who was even willing to die for our sins:

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors... For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:12, 14-15)

Not easy

But let us face it; it is not always so very easy to forgive and forget the sins of one who has done wrong or harm to us, is it? Especially if that person has done it repeatedly. And even more especially if the person is obviously unrepentant.

In cases like this, for the sake of his (or her) self-preservation, the sufferer who is on the receiving end of a sin must not be passive. He (or she) must take some common-sense, practical, corrective action. Depending on the specific case, this corrective action might have to be quite severe.

For example, what if a man had a wife like the one Potiphar had? Now, we cannot know this for sure, but I would think there is a strong probability that young Joseph was likely not the first handsome, young underling Mrs. Potiphar had tried take immoral advantage of.

In a case like that one, imagine how difficult it would be for a man to forgive the repeated sins of an unrepentant wife like that one. And how could he forget those sins? Especially in our day and age with over thirty sexually transmissible diseases to be concerned about! If he did not wish to divorce her, he would need to be always alert, keeping his eye on her constantly to make sure that she was never alone with any handsome young men.

So now, in conclusion, let me repeat the lessons to be learned from our comparison of “The Scarlet Letter” and the teaching of God’s Word about the Last Day of Unleavened Bread:

- God is our Judge; not men,
- We must examine ourselves, and we must do so continually,
- We must look at our own sins, and resist judging others,
- In God’s eyes, there are no small sins,
- Every sin is responsible for the death of our Saviour,
- If we will sincerely repent, God will totally forgive and forget our sins,
- God will not shame us or expose our repented-of sins at Christ’s return,
- We must put our own sins behind us,
- We must forgive and forget any wrongs others have done us.

As we leave the Feast of Unleavened Bread behind us and as we venture out into a new year of God’s sacred calendar, we can be encouraged by His boundless love, compassion and mercy.

But in addition, let every one of us, on an ongoing basis, apply to ourselves our Saviour’s loving dismissal and admonition: “Go, and sin no more.”

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Side-bar

Did God forget David's sins?

Upon reading the accompanying article, some may ask, "What about David? If God has forgotten his sins, why are they recorded forever in the scriptures?"

This is a very good question. Does this mean that there are some scriptures which contradict each other? Not at all. Let us review the scriptures in question. First of all, David's pleas for God to forgive and forget his sins:

Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Your mercy remember me, for Your goodness' sake, O LORD. (Psalm 25:7)

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions... Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. (Psalm 51:1, 9)

Would David even have wasted his time asking this favour of God, if what he asked were not possible? Asaph, another Psalmist, asks the same blessing, but upon on all Israel:

Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us! (Psalm 79:8)

David asks the converse on the wicked and deceitful enemies of God and His people:

For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue.... For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer... Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the LORD; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. (Psalm 109:2, 4, 14 KJV)

So what is the answer? God certainly *does* promise to forget all the sins of His people, and yet David's sins – and those of Paul, Abraham, Noah, Moses and others – remain recorded for every generation of mankind to read about. I believe that the answer is this:

For the majority of His people, God forgives and forgets our sins immediately upon our repentance. But for now and for good, powerful examples to His people, God has left some of the sins of David, Paul, etc. recorded in His Word.

But He *will* forget their sins at some future time – probably after their lessons have been fully learnt and are no longer necessary for mankind. This time might be at the time of the end of the Great White Throne Judgment period when all sin has finally been purged from the earth and God the Father comes to dwell with His children:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. (Isaiah 65:17)

It is my own conjecture that, at that time, God will cause Himself and all others to forget these things. Does God really have this kind of power?

It is logical that, if God really does have the power to force Himself to forget our sins, then it should be no problem for Him to oblige His children to do so. God has ultimate, total power over our minds, memories, recognition and understanding. This stupendous power is illustrated in the episode of the two disciples walking with Jesus on the road to Emmaus:

Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But *their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him*. And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?"... Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. (Luke 24:13-18, 28-31 accent ours)

First, their eyes were restrained so that they did not know Him. Later, their eyes were opened so that they knew Him. Who restrained then opened their eyes? Who else but God Himself?

So, again: Did God forget David's sins? The probable answer is "No, not yet." But He did forgive them and He *will* totally forget them in the future.

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