

12 FORGETTING FORMER THINGS

Isaiah 43:18-19 Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth...

Philippians 3:13 ...but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...

It is possible to have a carnal craving to look back at former things with sentimentalism. There can be a tendency to linger along the old, familiar corridors of time and stroll in the security of the tried and tested. On the other hand, there can also be an equally carnal coveting of new things in trying to keep up with the constantly changing fads and fashions of this world.

This exhortation to 'not remember the former things' can be applied to leaving behind a phase of life. When we have experienced success, it is natural to want to celebrate and commemorate what has happened. And when we have not, we would probably like to vindicate our failure by pressing on or trying again. 'Former things' imply the completion of a phase - it is over. The 'new thing' heralds the coming of another phase. Have we the spiritual gumption to drop everything instantly at the word of the Lord? Can we leave the past and status quo behind, and press on toward what He has for us ahead? There are always ample and legitimate reasons to keep us from doing so. The challenge to faith lies in taking the Lord's word against every other reasonable argument. For there really is no reason to take that course of action other than the conviction that He has spoken. No one will be able to verify that for you except the Holy Spirit who will give you the peace, joy, and assurance within. Either you are greatly misled, or everyone else is.

Forgetting the past does not come easily, whether it is of something good or bad. It takes a deliberate act of the will to do it. It has to be done by concurrently reaching forward to what is ahead. Doing the latter replaces the former. No progress can be made if we keep imprisoned by the past. For movement to take place, we must yield ground behind us in order to gain ground ahead. Do not worry about analysing, understanding, and ordering everything before moving on to the next step. There is a limit to what one can understand by pondering about the past. A fuller understanding and explanation can only be gained by going on to what lies ahead. Because our present level of knowledge and experience is inadequate for understanding and explaining the past, the only way to grow in knowledge is by going forward.

Beware of becoming stuck with a vision of the past whose time is long over. Soft sentimentalism for the good old days can be as much an obstacle to spiritual progress as outright opposition. The KJV Bible describes this state with the quaint expression "*settling on the lees*" (*Jeremiah 48:11 and Zephaniah 1:12*), likening such complacency to the dregs that have settled to the bottom of old wines. Old wine can be good minus the dregs; so is a happy heritage, but not living in the past. Make way for the future by forgetting the former things.