



START THE NEW YEAR WITH A CLEAN SLATE! FORGIVE!

This time of year is a time of reflecting on many things. We look back at the year behind us, our triumphs and highs, but also our failures and hurts. As we don't want to bring the wounds of the past year with us into the new one, it is the time to forgive.

Let's consider 3 areas of forgiveness :

1. Forgiveness toward God. Many are offended at God and harbor bitterness in their hearts toward Him. They have been falsely taught that He controls all things in the sense that He is fully responsible for sickness, death, tragedies and human suffering and they think He is the source of their pain and problems. They may know about Him, but they do not know Him intimately. The solution is to spend more time with Him and in His Word, in order to develop a close personal relationship. When you realize how much He loves you and how good He is, you won't anymore believe the lie that He is the author of pain and suffering.

2. Forgiveness toward yourself. Our past deeds can sometimes weigh very heavily on us with feelings of guilt and remorse. Unfortunately, there is no way to travel back in time to undo things we have done in the past, though many of us wish we could.

The vital starting point for forgiving yourself and being free from guilt and condemnation, is to understand that God forgives sinners who sincerely repent and turn to Him with a strong desire to live life differently. When you will do this, you will be able to move forward. Forgiving ourselves is just as important as forgiving others.

3. Forgiveness toward others. In Matthew 18, the apostle Peter asks Jesus, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus answers to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

Peter thought he was being very generous by offering to forgive his brother 7 times in one day, but Jesus said he should forgive him 490 times! Meaning that there should be no limit to our forgiveness.

Jesus goes on to tell the story of a king who, moved with compassion, forgave the huge debt of one of his servants. However, this same servant treated harshly another fellow servant who owed him a much smaller amount of money and even sent him into prison! Hearing about this, the king called him back and said : 'You wicked servant! ... Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And he sent him to prison.... "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

The main thrust of this parable is that when people wrong us, we should remember God's great mercy towards us and respond in kind. Our sins sent a perfect sinless man to the cross. He endured the shame, the torture, and ultimately death, to forgive you for them. Forgiving someone else starts with understanding what it took for God to forgive you.

When we receive Jesus in our lives as our Savior, God does not impute our sins unto us. Thus we have no right to hold on to unforgiveness, and the Lord warns us that if we do not forgive others their sins, our Father will not forgive ours.

This New Year, let us strive for the blank slate of a heart full of forgiveness. Not only will it enable us to be closer to God and at peace with Him, but it will also bring healing, love and peace to us and to our world.