**FORGIVENESS**

It is my belief that most of the problems of the world could be solved by one thing: forgiveness. I once served a church in another state. A lady in the church would call me at different times, crying about having an affair with a married man when she was 16 years old. Her age when she was calling me was in her 80’s. In all that time, she had not forgiven herself. I asked her if she had confessed that sin to God. She insisted that she had. I told her about I John 1:9, where scripture promises that if we confess our sins, we are forgiven by God. She believed God had forgiven her, but still she would not forgive herself. Notice that I said, “would not.” People often say they *can* not, but what they mean is they *will* not.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” The Apostle Paul once wrote (II Corinthians 5) “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against them….” And the Apostle John wrote (I John 2), referring to Jesus, “…he is the forgiveness for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” These verses tell us the message we should share with the world—“God has forgiven you!”

When I was twenty years old, I committed my life to Jesus. I believe at that time I was forgiven of my sins. But for nearly twenty years as a Christian, I was afraid I was lost, because my sins were too great. I was constantly struggling with evil habits. Finally, one day in a class entitled “understanding your own personality,” I was told to read I John 3:16: “By this we know love, not that we loved him, but that he loved us, and gave himself for us.” Then I was told to read that and put my name where it said “we” and “us.” I did, and the universe seemed to lurch! Suddenly, I realized that no matter how bad I was, God had forgiven me; Jesus had even died for me! I was free of sin. Then I was immediately able to forgive myself. I also stopped judging others. I was suddenly free! I had never felt so free, so much myself. I was 38 years old when this happened.

Our father Abraham had eight sons. First he had Ishmael, who was the son of a slave woman—Hagar of Egypt, the slave of Sarah, Abraham’s wife. After Sarah miraculously became pregnant at age 89, Isaac was born. Ishmael hated Isaac; he was jealous of Isaac, because Isaac was not a slave child, but the special son of God’s promise. Abraham had another wife named Keturah. She had 6 sons by Abraham. So of the eight sons of Abraham, only Isaac was the son of Abraham and Sarah; only Isaac was the son God had promised. It is similar to the story of Joseph in Genesis; all the brothers hated Isaac, just as Joseph’s brothers hated him and sold him into slavery.

What if all of Abraham’s children had forgiven each other? What would the world be like today? Finally, peace reigns between Irish Catholics and British Protestants. Is peace possible everywhere in the world? Not without forgiveness.

What if dads would forgive moms or moms forgive dads? What if children would forgive parents? What if the whole world experienced forgiveness? What happens is this: when people realize they are forgiven by God, they can forgive not only themselves, but others.

I know of families in which people have held grudges against each other for a lifetime—children against parents, sons against daughters, and so on. The cycle may continue for many generations—until someone in the family forgives. Forgiveness is the key to joy in relationships. Forgiveness is the answer to most of the problems of the world.