

I wish you all a happy New Year!

Some people don't celebrate the arrival of the new year; they celebrate the survival of the old year.

Lots of people still engage in the practice of making New Year resolutions.

Let's be sure we all understand that what the New Year brings to you will largely depend on what you bring to the New Year.

- The New Year is as good an opportunity as any for a fresh start in life.

There's a whole genre of television shows about helping people get a complete makeover of their lives.

I've think the most popular one currently is "The Biggest Loser." People who struggle with extreme overweight problems compete over a period of time to lose the greatest percentage of weight.

There are also makeovers for the whole family. A needy family gets a complete makeover of their house. It's practically gutted and rebuilt into the home of their dreams.

People love this stuff! There's so much ugliness in the world that a show about a radical makeover draws viewers like moths to a light bulb on a dark night.

- This motif of an extreme makeover also has profound spiritual meaning.

The Apostle Paul explained that if anyone is "in Christ"—meaning, "a Christian"—he is a new creation; the old has passed and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

A true follower of Jesus Christ is someone who has undergone a complete makeover from the inside out.

- We should expect people who have experienced such a radical spiritual makeover to be distinct from other people.

The culture we live in exerts enormous pressure on us to conform. But we don't have to capitulate to it.

The Apostle Peter wrote, *'His (Jesus our Lord's) divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness though our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.'* (2 Peter 1:3).

We can rely on divine power so that we don't limp along as feeble Christians.

- The Apostle Paul explains this clearly in his letter to the Colossian Church. Let's look at Chapter 3:1-17:

¹ *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*

² *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

³ *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

⁴ *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

⁵ *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

⁶ *Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.*

⁷ *You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.*

⁸ *But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.*

⁹ *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices*

¹⁰ *and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

¹¹ *Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

¹² *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

¹³ *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

¹⁴ *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

¹⁵ *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

¹⁷ *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

The start of this New Year is an excellent time to take personal inventory of our lives—what's working and what's not working. And God's Word gives us some worthy resolutions.

Every follower of the Lord Jesus Christ has a responsibility to make and to keep resolutions that affect some basic aspects of life:

I. YOUR DEEPEST LONGINGS. Colossians 3:1-4

Your deepest longings explain who you are and what makes you “tick.”

Worthwhile resolutions address who you are, first and foremost.

¹ *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*

² *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

The Apostle Paul urged Christ’s followers in Rome, *‘Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.’* (Romans 12:2)

What does it mean not to conform; not to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things?

I assure you it doesn’t mean to live in a cocoon of religious naïveté, blissfully out of touch with the reality of nitty-gritty everyday struggles.

It means not making the stuff of this world the foundation upon which we build our lives. Why is that?

³ *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins. If you put your faith in Jesus Christ, God reckons your old sinful self as having died with him. You now have new life because you are “in Christ.”

⁴ *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

The best is yet to come. We don’t experience in this world the fullness of all God has prepared for his children. That’s why we are heavenly minded. What we long for most of all will come to us from heaven when Christ appears.

That’s when we will become all we look forward to becoming.

We’re like young boys dribbling a basketball. They are barely 4 feet tall, but they look forward to growing up to be more than 7 feet tall.

- If you are a follower of Jesus Christ your resolutions must get right down to your deepest longings.

If you don’t make resolutions that penetrate to the core of who you are, there’s no point in making any other resolutions because they probably won’t last.

II. YOUR MORAL STANDARDS. Colossians 3:5-10

This second resolution comes out of the first resolution.

⁵ *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

⁶ *Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.*

⁷ *You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.*

Paul uses the adverb “therefore” to connect what he says in verse 5 with what he has just said in verses 1-4.

Because you have new life by faith in Christ, resulting in new affections, *therefore* your moral standards must also be different from the standards of a fallen society.

The stuff of the fallen, sinful, earthly nature doesn’t belong in our lives anymore. (5)

- Don’t just try to keep those vices under control, like chaining a dangerous pit bull. Put them to death. Kill them!

Many times I have tried to restrain inappropriate desires, because they’re enticing. But they are monsters. They easily break through the restraints and tyrannize me again. Do you know what I mean?

Paul says, kill those evil monsters. There’s nothing cute about them.

If you have new life in Christ Jesus, then don’t keep the desires of your old nature on life support. Pull the plug on them. Don’t let them survive the death of your old sinful nature.

Dag Hammarskjöld, the Swedish statesman who was the 2nd Secretary General of the United Nations wrote in his book, *Markings*: *‘You cannot play with the animal in you without becoming wholly animal, play with falsehood without forfeiting your right to truth, play with cruelty without losing your sensitivity of mind. He who wants to keep his garden tidy doesn’t reserve a plot for weeds.’* (Dag Hammarskjöld)

God’s power gives you all you need to get that stuff out of your life.

In the 3rd book of C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia: Voyage of the Dawntrader*, Gumpas, the Governor of Lone Island comments on Prince Caspian’s disapproval of slave trading. He asks, “Have you no idea of

progress, of development?” Caspian answers, “I’ve seen them both in an egg. We call it *going bad* in Narnia.”

- It’s easy to convince people you are the epitome of piety. But behind that pure exterior there may be a lot of filth. Religion seems to foster such deception.

Jesus confronted some religious officials about this: *‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean.’* (Matthew 23:27).

God sees everything in each of our lives just as it is.

God sees us, and he sees through us.

Solomon said, *‘For a man’s ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths.’* (Proverbs 5:21)

- Some of you women may be thinking right now, “He’s talking to the men. Sock it to them.” It’s true, these horrible vices in verse 5 (*sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry*) have brought down many a Christian man.

Aren’t you glad none of these things are a problem for women? Yeah, sure!

I’ve been a pastor long enough to know that women in the church can do just as much spiritual damage to their souls as men do, just in slightly different ways.

Solomon said a man’s ways and a woman’s ways—the term is generic in Proverbs 5:21—are in full view of the Lord. God is watching the women as much as he is watching the men.

- The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians: *‘Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.’* (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

A key sentence in that statement is Paul’s clarification *‘And that is what some of you were.’*

But you have had a complete makeover! You’re not like that anymore.

Paul made sure the Colossian and Corinthian Christians understood that God accepted them even though their lives were at one time polluted by gross immorality. They had been cleansed.

- If you are a Christian, you have been cleansed. So don’t be like a mangy mutt that goes back to its vomit!

⁸ *But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.*

⁹ *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices*

¹⁰ *and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

There is no place for anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, and lying in the lives of Christ’s followers.

- Nature abhors a vacuum. In a world under the control of evil, evil things will rush into a vacuum in our lives. You can count on it.

It’s not enough to stop doing evil things. Paul writes, *‘you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.’*

Off with the old; on with the new. That’s what a resolution in the area of your moral standards demands. It’s all or nothing.

III. YOUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS. Colossians 3:11-15

¹¹ *Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

In Jesus Christ all people are equal.

There is one, and only one, who is above all. He is our hero, our Savior, our Lord—Jesus Christ.

Few things in life are uglier than Christians getting snooty and regarding some other Christians as beneath them.

Secular society confers status on people. But when we come to Christ, without exception each one of us submits in utter humility.

¹² *Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

God has chosen us in Christ, and we are holy—distinct from the world—and dearly loved. So it’s dishonoring to God if we deal harshly with one another.

¹³ *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

- Tragically, there are Christians who refuse to forgive another Christian.

This is no trivial matter. Jesus stressed it in the prayer he taught his disciples and in his comment afterward,

‘For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.’ (Matthew 6:14-15)

Where would each of us be were it not for God’s forgiveness in Christ? How dare we withhold that forgiveness from each other! Christ’s words imply that if we do so we place our own forgiveness in jeopardy

¹⁴ *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

¹⁵ *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

- Personal relationships that Christ expects of his people are more than just the absence of hostility or hatred. I heard someone say about another Christian, *‘I don’t have anything against him. I just don’t want to have anything to do with him.’*

That’s self-deception, because there’s hostility there no matter what you call it.

There’s no place for compassion and kindness and humility and gentleness and patience and forgiveness in such an attitude. It betrays a callused soul.

God sees our attitudes towards others. We must resolve to honor God in our relationships with people he has forgiven—people just like us.

IV. YOUR CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITIES. Colossians 3:16-17

Christians are responsible for one another.

The Bible makes it clear that we are connected to each other as parts of a living spiritual organism called the church.

We are interdependent members of that body. We need each other.

Here in verse 16 Paul emphasizes one of the ways we express our responsibilities for each other.

¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

Please pay close attention to the indispensable function of the word of Christ—God’s Word.

It’s the truth of God’s Word in you that equips you to enrich each other spiritually. That’s how we help each other grow spiritually.

We desperately need each other to take God’s Word seriously.

Today a lot of people want sermons to be short and sweet, so that they don’t have to deal with God’s Word for more than just a few minutes—as if “a little dab’ll do you.”

What does God’s Word say here? “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” That requires regular, daily, rich deposits of God’s word in your soul.

- Then we can properly express our gratitude to God in worship.

That’s not going to happen if the only input people get is 15-minute sermonettes for Christianettes.

¹⁷ *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Our words and deeds should be of such a kind that we could readily attach the name of Jesus Christ to them.

- This is our Christian responsibility. Are we living in a way that represents Jesus Christ well? **Do we make Jesus Christ attractive to others?**

Are your deepest longings what they ought to be? Your success as a follower of Jesus Christ depends on what your heart and mind are set on.

What about your moral standards? It’s not enough just to resolve to get rid of immoral vices. You must resolve to be like Jesus Christ—to be constantly renewed in his nature.

Do you need to make a resolution about dealing with some strained relationships that you thought you could take care of by just keeping your distance? That’s totally unacceptable to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Maybe your soul is starving from a dearth of God’s Word. You’re into experiences and relationships and you enjoy praise songs, but the word of God is anorexic in your life. Are you willing to dedicate some prime time each day for prayerfully reading God’s Word?

- These are worthy resolutions for Christians for this New Year.