

## QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

**73 Is it Proper for Christians to Make New Year's Resolutions?**

*Scripture: Leviticus 16:29-34*

With the passing of time we have again come to the threshold of a new year. Christians are people who have come to realize that God is actually the giver of many new things. They have come to God by faith in Christ and been given new life, life which is eternal. Then they have been given a new nature, a new assurance, and a new task. Finally, at the end of their earthly pilgrimage, they will receive a new home called Heaven, and ultimately they will be given new bodies. But for our purposes this morning, let us consider the new year God is giving to us.

This is the time when many people are making New Year's resolutions. Are you a New Year's resolution maker? You are going to eat less in the new year and exercise more. Perhaps you have decided to spend fewer hours in front of the television. Maybe you have decided to spend more time with your family or you are mindful of being a better person than you have been in the past. These are but a few examples of the kinds of resolutions people make upon entering a new year. But what about resolutions and Christians? I have been asked if there is any Biblical basis for believers making New Year's resolutions.

We can begin by saying that some Christians do not believe in this practice. Their reasoning is that the Christian life is not a matter of turning over a new leaf. It is not the kind of experience whereby one pulls himself up by his own bootstraps. It is not reformation or change which is brought about by the "power of positive thinking." The feeling is that these things are works. They have more to do with the flesh than the Holy Spirit who energizes the believer and changes him for the better. Furthermore, some people look askance at resolutions because so many of them never amount to anything. They just don't last. Yes, there are some people who reason that Christians ought not to do this kind of thing, and what they have to say seems to have a sound ring to it, it sounds orthodox and pious. But is it? To the contrary, I believe it is possible to draft a theology of resolution from the Scriptures which would cause one to conclude that it is proper and fitting to observe the coming of a new year with a prayerful determination to make certain adjustments which are needful in ones life.

## **I. THERE MAY BE A PRECEDENT FOR CELEBRATING NEW YEARS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT:**

The New Testament gives no clue as to whether or not the first Christians observed the New Year. It is in the Old Testament that we find the practice of rejoicing associated with the turn of the year. It was in mid-September that New Year's was celebrated in the Jewish economy. The beginning of the year, Rosh Hashanah, was introduced by the memorial of trumpet blowing on the first day of the seventh month. (Leviticus 23:24) This was a time of great rejoicing as the people gathered in holy convocation looking forward to the day when God's people would be gathered around His throne in the eternal kingdom. Perhaps in the new year Messiah would come to His people.

This occasion of rejoicing was soon followed by ten days of confession which led to the solemn observance of Yom Kippur, the "Day of Atonement." The various details of this enactment are described in Leviticus 16. A bullock was first offered for the sins of the high priest himself. This is described in Leviticus 16:5-22. The high priest was then directed by God to select two goats, one of which was to be slain and his blood offered at the mercy seat in the holy place in the tabernacle. The second goat, the "scapegoat," had the sins of the people confessed over his head and was then released into the wilderness. The goats symbolized to the people several very important truths. It was to be known that the wages of sin is death. They were to understand that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. They were also to realize that sins thus covered were removed from God's sight. This solemn ritual was repeated with the dawn of each new year and the people were reminded of the seriousness of sin in the sight of a God whose important attribute was His absolute holiness. We can only imagine that as they confessed their sin and saw the death which came to the innocent substitute, they purposed within themselves to live for the Lord God more fully in the new year at hand. I don't know, I say there may be some basis here for observing with prayerful determination and resolution the dawn of our new year. I do not think we need be afraid of structure of this kind.

## **II. A HOLY RESOLVE MARKED THE LIVES OF EARLIER BELIEVERS:**

It is the Christian belief and teaching that we can learn from the example of others. The apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians told them that they should not be ignorant of those who had gone before and of their experience of God. He tells them that what has been recorded about their lives was specifically for their

admonition. The passage is I Corinthians 10:1-12. I suppose they were to learn both from the weaknesses and the strengths of those who lived before. As we are willing be of this same mind, some moving lessons arise in reference to this matter of resolution.

**1. Joshua resolved that he and his household would serve the Lord.**

Anyone who has been around the Bible for any length of time is doubtless familiar with the verse found in Joshua 24:15. The occasion of this statement is an exciting one. This man Joshua had become the very helpful companion to Moses during the exodus and wilderness wanderings. He was at Sinai when the Law was given. (Exodus 24:13) He was one of the spies who entered the land to determine its accessibility. Joshua and Caleb were the only ones to survive the resultant 40 years of wandering. (Numbers 14:6) When Moses died, Joshua was the obvious one to lead the nation. (Deuteronomy 34:9) The book of Joshua tells the story of Israel's history from the death of Moses to the death of Joshua and the conquest of Canaan which came between the two deaths. God had promised His people a land, but it was not just given to them. A series of battles would be fought in their taking possession of that land. At last, the land is won and the twelve tribes are scattered throughout. Near the end of his life, Joshua made a farewell address. Their brilliant military commander reminded the people that as long as they would follow the Lord, they would prosper. If they forgot Him, and wandered after idols, a blizzard of troubles would overtake them. Joshua and the nation renew the covenant which follows an earlier pattern. The King's title is given, past favors are reviewed, instructions are given, and warnings issued. (Joshua 24: 2, 2b-13, 14-15, 19-20)

**2. Jacob resolved to bring his tithe to the Lord.** Jacob was the son of Isaac and Rebekah, a twin of Esau. He was a quiet man who became Rebekah's favorite. Esau became a skillful hunter. It was on one occasion that Esau came home from hunting, and being very hungry, he begged food of Jacob. Jacob agreed to feed him on the condition that he surrender his birthright, for Esau was the first twin born. Esau consented and while he was hunting Jacob was persuaded by Rebekah to seek the birthright blessing from Isaac. When Esau discovered what had happened he resolved to kill his brother. For fear of his life Jacob fled. The first night he slept under the stars. He had a dream in which he saw a ladder stretching from heaven to earth. Angels ascended and descended. God promised Jacob His presence. (Genesis 25:33;

28:12-15) This dream had a great influence on him. When he awoke he made a resolution before the Lord. He said, *"Of all that Thou dost give to me, I will surely give a tenth to Thee."* (Genesis 28:18-22) It happens that Jacob did not keep his vow faithfully. That morning when he made the vow, he had very little to call his own, probably just a lunch of sorts and the clothing he wore. When he returned to that place years later, he was a wealthy man. Jacob had many faults. In later life he acknowledged his waywardness and remembered God's grace. (Genesis 48:15-16; 21)

3. **David made two resolutions.** David, the son of Jesse, was born in Bethlehem. He was the youngest of eight brothers. He was the shepherd boy who became Israel's second king. During his life he made at least two resolutions. He resolved on one occasion to read the Scriptures and to adopt them as a standard for his life. He said, *"Teach me Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth."* (Psalm 86:11; 19:7-10) David also made a resolution to pray. He wrote in Psalm 116:2, *"Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will call upon him as long as I live."* David had many experiences with God which proved to him that God answered prayer. He therefore resolved that he would keep calling on God as long as he lived.
4. **Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself.** As a young boy Daniel was taken to Babylon and made ready for the king's service. Not only his studies, but his food was prescribed by the king. But Daniel and three of his friends refused to eat food which had been offered to idols. (Daniel 1:8) They requested a change of food. After a test was given the request was granted, for these young Jews were found to be in better physical condition than those who had eaten the King's food. Daniel 1:8 reads, *"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine he drank."* One would suppose that he would have lost out by keeping such a vow. But instead he won the hearts of King Nebuchadnezzar and his successors. He became an important man in the kingdom. Though he was a very long way from home, Daniel reasoned that his God was present in Babylon as well. He resolved to live for Him there.
5. **Paul resolved to press on for Christ.** Perhaps the most widely known resolution passage may be drawn from Philippians 3:7-16. Here Paul resolves to be humble about his past. Phillips translates Philippians 3:12, *"I do not consider myself to have arrived spiritually. I am still on the move as it were."* Paul, further resolves that he will not allow the past to defeat him.

This he frames in the words, *"...forgetting those things which are behind."* Paul's reasoning was that the past was either a weight or a spur. As a weight to immobilize him or a spur to move him on to better things. Also, he resolved to do something about his life. He said, *"This one thing I do,"* He crowns these resolutions with the words, *"All of us who are spiritually adult, let us set this standard for our lives."*

Judging from these examples, it strikes me that there is a place for resolution in the life of the Christian. Not one of these men was perfect. Each had his faults and failures. But who is to tell what they might have been possessed of this attitude. It is a paradox to me that people who have not the enabling presence of God in their lives are constantly making resolutions. But to the contrary, the Christian who has been given divine power to rely upon so often fails to make resolutions.

### **III. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE BEGINS WITH A RESOLUTION AND PROGRESSES ACCORDINGLY:**

It has been said that there is a universal wish of mankind expressed in all religions, poetry; art, and in all philosophy. That wish is to go beyond oneself, the urge to be a different and improved person in some way. Many philosophers have felt that this urge can be fulfilled, that cry and supply are built into this universe in which we live. The reasoning can be, "I am made for love. But is there a love to be found which will satisfy me?" Or it may be, "I am a thinking person. Is there an intelligence which I may turn to?" Many have found that these and other needs are met sufficiently by the person and work of Jesus Christ. They have resolved, therefore, that He will be their Savior and Lord. What they have done is to make a certain determination about Him...to trust Him...to walk with Him...to serve Him. The whole Christian life actually begins with a resolution to do something. But because we are what we are, because this world is the kind of place it is, and because there is a great enemy who would ruin us in our determination, it soon becomes evident that in living the Christian life day by day, adjustments and new beginnings are often called for. The urge to be an improved person, to be more like the Lord Jesus is certainly more likely to be fulfilled when we make up our minds what it is we are going to do.

Listen to what the dictionary says about the word **resolve**. It comes from the Latin word, **resolvere**, which means to "loosen" or to "dissolve." It means to separate or to break up into constituent parts. It means to "transform by

analysis, to solve as a problem, to unravel, to clear up. In the field of optics, it means to distinguish or render visible the separate parts and to dissolve the lines of a spectrum. In chemistry it means separate components. In music it means to progress from discord into concord or harmony. This is what resolutions do. They require us to separate or to distinguish the various aspects of our Christian life, so that we can make some meaningful determination. We cannot resolve to do everything differently, in which case we will do nothing differently. We would do well to resolve in our hearts, by the grace of God, to do some things in the new year. Consider:

1. **Make some personal resolution concerning your private life.** Think of some aspect of your life which needs to be changed and in which you feel God is seeking a change.
2. **Make a resolution as to something specific concerning your family.** Is everyone being treated as he or she should be.
3. **Make a resolution about your work.** Perhaps to see it as your best contact with others who do not know the Lord. Perhaps as the opportunity to accomplish and do certain specific things to the glory of the Lord.
4. **Make a resolution to find your daily strength in the Lord.** These are uncertain and troubled times in which we live. Life supporters such as daily prayer, study of the Scripture, and dependence upon the Holy Spirit will suffice to make us over comers in whatever the new year brings.

Alan B. Christensen, Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church, Wilton, CT,  
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