

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

74 Should Christians Make New Year's Resolutions?

Scripture: Philippians 2:12-13

We have all been through it before, some of us more times than we care to remember. I am talking about New Years, the celebration which attends the closing of one year and the opening of another. Resolutions are a common interest but some people do not believe in them. The feeling is that such intentions are more self-centered than they are Christ centered and thus not glorifying to God. Beside, determinations which only end in failure, as they so often do, can hardly be much of a testimony. Yes, there are some Christians who have little interest in New Year's resolutions.

Because I believe such resolves need not be self-centered or doomed to failure, I have come to view these timely evaluations and determinations as helpful in one's Christian experience. The reason why so many resolutions do not stick is because the resources needed to fulfill them are lacking. As far as a testimony is concerned, I believe it far better to desire better things, though sometimes to fall short, than to be among those whose strength is their apathy and complacency. Consider then, several resolutions which might be gleaned from Paul's Philippian letter.

I. I WILL NOT TAKE BACK WHAT I HAVE ALREADY GIVEN:

It is the nature of people to be preoccupied with themselves. It is so easy to dwell upon our problems, disappointments, plans, desires, and etc. The attitude becomes one of what I am going to do. Something happens. People don't realize that they have made themselves the God of their situations. But we are not God, and we must cease from thinking we are. Some of this lingers even on the threshold of faith. Christians are people who are willing to allow God to be God. Paul expressed this truth in the words, *"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 1:6) A very worthy resolution, where such is needed, is that inasmuch as I have given my life to Christ, I will not take it back. I will rest in the confidence, that he is doing a good work in me, even through the circumstances which touch my life from day to day.

II. I WILL USE MY HANDICAPS:

The words of Philippians 1:12-14 are auto biographical. Coming thus out of life, they are of value to us. This man once lived in our world and he tasted the bitterness of affliction and difficulty. But he used his affliction for his own enrichment and for the betterment of others. Paul was always doing this. Surely he would not have chosen imprisonment as a way of ministry. Clearly, it was a handicap. What are we to do with handicaps which touch our lives? Reactions are often varied. Some ignore them and others surrender to them. Some become stoics and find a pride in being able to stand up and take it. But there are other ways to deal with handicaps. We can use them by allowing them to convince us of our need for strength only the Lord can give and of our utter dependence upon him. We can allow our handicaps to give us an understanding heart and concern for others. We can use our handicaps to develop other abilities and strengths we may have. Lastly, we can with Paul, employ what has happened to us as an opportunity to advance the gospel. I wonder what changes might take place if Christians the world over used their handicaps.

III. I WILL LEARN TO FACE UP TO LIFE:

I have the Christian life in mind and the particular issue is that of suffering. In Philippians 1:29 we read, *"For it is granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for Him."* Paul urged these early believers to accept their share of the suffering which will accompany the normal Christian life. He knew it was up to them. Realistically, there is a cleavage between believing and suffering. Many flatly refuse to suffer for Christ. They take the easier way and seek to get through life with the least possible difficulty. Paul spoke to the Philippians this way for the simple reason that he and all of us are tempted to shirk. For those who have not taken their stand for Christ in the hard place in the past, it is a worthy resolution.

IV. I WILL REMEMBER AND BE GRATEFUL FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD:

Philippians 1:3 reads, *"I thank my God every time I remember you."* All through the letter Paul reflects upon the presence of other believers in his life who have been a help and encouragement to him. The first thing Jesus did after he ascended was to distribute gifts to his followers in order for them to do the work he had left for them. Just as he recognized the importance of these gifts, so should we. He expects us to affirm one another's gifts, to respect one another's role in the fellowship of believers. We fail to do this when we are unwilling to

listen to what others are saying. If God wanted to speak to us we would conceive of him doing so through circumstances, His written Word, perhaps through a dream or imagination. But he might want to speak to us through another Christian or he might want to otherwise encourage us by their presence. Not always, do we view our fellow believers in this way.

V. I WILL BE FORGIVING:

Paul speaks of those who preach Christ of envy and rivalry, of selfish ambition, supposing to stir up trouble for him. (1:15-18) He speaks of Euodia and Syntyche who were at odds with one another. While he does not mention the word forgiveness, we may be sure that this man who wrote so much about forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13) toward those whose presence did not help the work. We ought to forgive others for our own sakes. There are certain deadly foes to the personality. Psychologists agree they tear life apart. Self centeredness, worry, guilt and hate are these foes. A deadly blow is struck to the personality of the person who knows not how to forgive, fellowship with God is impaired, and service for God is effected.

VI. I WILL GUARD AGAINST LOSING THE JOY OF SERVICE:

Paul described the Philippian believers with the words, *"my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown."* How quickly and how easy it is for believers to lose their joy in the work. Time does not seem to be on their side. They begin well, but slowly the smile disappears and signs of strain begin to appear. Such people often fail to understand what the rewards for service are in this life. Paradoxically, the more responsibility we assume for the Lord, the more God gives to us. The Lord rewards service with more service. We fail to realize that in ministry, service itself is the greatest reward and gratification. Doing the Lord's work is where the action is or should be.

VII. I WILL NOT FORGET THE BOTTOM LINE:

Accountants often speak of the bottom line, the final figure after outgo has been balanced against income. The bottom line insofar as resolutions is that the Christian will not allow his past to defeat him and he will draw upon the resources of God for the future. We have the familiar words of Philippians 3:14 and 4:13 to remind us of these principles. How easy it is to allow the past to frighten us, to shackle us, to immobilize us and keep us from functioning as we should. Paul's advice is to use the past by learning from it, but if you can't learn from it, forget it. The past is either a weight or a spur. As a weight it renders us

useless and joyless. In God's mercy it becomes that which is able to teach and guide us. And, of course, we have the indwelling Christ to help us.

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