

New Year's Resolutions

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[0 : 00] But if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, this morning if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, and if we take as our text the words of verse 17.

2 Corinthians 5, verse 17. We mentioned at the New Year's Day service on Monday that at the beginning of a new year, we often make New Year's resolutions. We resolve to improve upon last year, either by losing weight or giving up smoking if you smoke or reducing our alcohol intake or even taking up exercise. Whatever it is, we often make New Year's resolutions in order to improve upon the year that has just passed. And since Monday, apart from wanting to lose some weight, I haven't really come up with a good New Year's resolution.

But I was reading some of the resolutions of another minister, because there was an American minister called Jonathan Edwards. And Jonathan Edwards, he was a powerhouse of a preacher. [1 : 44] He was used mightily by the Lord in the Great Awakening during the 18th century. But it was actually when Jonathan Edwards was a teenager, when Jonathan Edwards was a young Christian in his teens, he wrote down a series of resolutions which he sought to live by in order to help him grow as a Christian.

And the thing about Jonathan Edwards' resolutions is that there weren't just one or two of them. There were 70 of them. There were 70 resolutions.

Now, before you switch off and think, nope, Myrtle, too much, too much. Jonathan Edwards, he wrote 70 resolutions. And he read and reread these 70 resolutions at least once a week.

And he did so in order to keep his mind focused upon Jesus. In fact, at the top of his list, he would have this list where he would keep it on his desk.

At the top of his list of 70 resolutions, Jonathan Edwards wrote this. He writes, And just to give you a flavor of Jonathan Edwards' resolutions, I'll read some of them to you.

[3 : 13] So number one, this is what he writes, resolved. I will do whatever I think will be most to God's glory and my own good, profit and pleasure for as long as I live.

Number five, resolved. Never lose one moment of time, but seize the time to use it in the most profitable way I possibly can.

Number 14, resolved. Never do anything out of revenge. It's a very important one. Number 16, resolved.

Never to speak evil of anyone, except if it is necessary for some real good. Number 19, resolved. Never to do anything which I would be afraid to do if I expected to hear the last trumpet sound and Jesus to return.

And one I found very, very challenging. Number 37. He writes, resolved. To inquire every night as I am going to bed. Where I may have been negligent.

[4 : 21] What sin I have committed. And how I have denied myself. I will also do this at the end of every week. Every month. And every year. And you know, I'd encourage you to read through Jonathan Edwards' resolutions.

There's a link in this week's intimations online. So read through them. They're very challenging. Very, very challenging. But Jonathan Edwards, he had 70 resolutions.

This morning, I only want to give you one. One New Year's resolution as we go into 2024. 2024. Because what we see here in this passage is that there's a resolution that will give you a new position.

It will make you a new person. And give you a new purpose. This resolution is one that will give you a new position. It will make you a new person. And it will set before you a new purpose.

And there are our three headings this morning. A new position. A new person. And a new purpose. New position. New person. New purpose. So first of all, we see this resolution here in verse 17. [5 : 26] It gives to us a new position. A new position. Paul writes there in verse 17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. And you know, as a preacher and as a pastor, Paul, the Apostle Paul, he must have had a soft spot for the church in Corinth because the church in Corinth, it was one of the first churches that Paul planted on one of his many missionary journeys.

But sadly, the church in Corinth, you could say it was the most carnal church that Paul ever had to deal with. Because the Corinthians, they were what you would call a worldly church.

They were obsessed with worldly experiences, worldly enjoyments, worldly endeavors. But of course, what didn't help was that the church in Corinth, it was swamped and even surrounded by this carnal city, the carnal capital of the Greek world.

Because Corinth, as a city, it was a seaport city, a wealthy seaport city, which made its fortune by being a key trade route between the cities that were east and west on the Mediterranean Sea.

[6 : 42] And so as a key trade route, the city of Corinth would have had lots of people moving in and lots of people moving out. It would have been this hive of hustle and bustle, moving about with people from all over the world, passing through this seaport city every week of every day of every year.

And as you'd expect, the carnal capital of the Greek world, Corinth, had sought to attract and even to appease every itch that could possibly be scratched.

Because Corinth was a city, and when you read through Paul's letters to the Corinthians, you see there was a city that was overrun with sexual immorality, homosexuality, drunkenness, pride, and idolatry.

Corinth was a city like many cities in our nation today. You know, there was even a divide between classes in Corinth because there were those who were rich and educated and those who were poor and uneducated.

And sadly, the Christians in Corinth, the Christian church in Corinth, they had forgotten or even failed to remember that separation is not isolation.

[7 : 55] It's contact without contamination. That's something we should always remember as Christians. Separation is not isolation. It's contact without contamination.

And I say that because the church in Corinth, it had actually been contaminated. It had been contaminated by the carnal city that surrounded it, the carnal city of Corinth.

Because the church in Corinth, as Paul writes to them, the church in Corinth was overrun, like the city, with sexual immorality, homosexuality, drunkenness, pride, idolatry, division, and also deception.

There was deception in the church at Corinth. But the deception wasn't from outside the church. The deception was from inside the church.

The deception was from false teachers and their false teaching within the church. And their deception was dangerous. And it was so dangerous because they were claiming and confessing that Paul the apostle was a fraud and he was a false teacher.

[9 : 01] That's what these false teachers were saying. They were saying, don't listen to a word Paul has to say. He's a fraud. He's a phony. He's a false teacher. And you know, it's into that context and that background that Paul sets before the Corinthians and us.

He sets before you the truth of the matter. Paul doesn't want you to be ignorant. He says that so often. He doesn't want us to be ignorant. He wants us to realize that all these accusations and all these insinuations that are being made against him, they're not true.

And Paul says to them, I want to give you a resolution. I want you to know if you're a Christian or not. And the resolution that I will give you, says Paul, it will give you a new position.

It will make you a new person and it will set before you a new purpose to live your life as a Christian. A new position, a new person, and a new purpose.

And we can see that it's a new position because the first thing Paul says is, if anyone is in Christ. If anyone is in Christ.

[10 : 10] It's a new position because being in Christ is a new position. Being in Christ is a new position. As you know, there are only two types of positions.

Only two types of people. There are only two types of people who ever come to church. There are only two types of people in the world. And they're in one of two positions because they're either in Christ or they're out of Christ.

They're either in Christ or out of Christ. And the question we always need to be confronted with, the question you need to concern yourself with at the beginning of another year is, what position are you in?

What position are you in? Are you in Christ? Or are you still out of Christ? What position are you in? Are you in or are you out?

And if you're out of Christ, the Bible teaches us that you're not saved. And if you're not saved, you're lost. If you're out of Christ, you're not walking in the light because you're walking in darkness. [11:12] If you're out of Christ, the Bible teaches, and Paul teaches us here, you're still in Adam. You're in union with Adam. You're united to Adam, the first man.

And the bad news is, your position in Adam, it leads to death. Not just physical death, but spiritual death, and eternal death in hell.

That's your position. That's your starting point. That's your starting position because we're all born in Adam. We are all born in this position out of Christ and in Adam.

We're all born in the sin of the first man, Adam. And all that was true of Adam is true of you and true of me. All that was, when Adam sinned, we sinned.

That's what the Bible teaches us. When Adam fell, we fell. When Adam was condemned by God, we were condemned by God. When Adam was cursed, we were cursed. Our catechism teaches us all mankind by their fall, descending from Adam, and they fell with him and sinned in him in his first transgression.

[12:25] Do you know, that's the misery. That's the mess we have fallen into. We're under God's wrath and curse. We're liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself and to the pains of hell forever.

That's our starting position. That's our starting point. That's the bad news. That's the bad news. I'm sorry to tell you, but that's the bad news of our starting position.

But of course, Paul here, he's a preacher. He's a pastor. He loves lost sinners. And he doesn't want us to remain in Adam. Paul wants us to acquire, he wants us to adopt this new resolution, this new position.

And he sets before us the good news of the gospel. And what does he say? Verse 17. If anyone is in Christ. If anyone is in Christ.

And notice Paul says, if anyone. And when Paul says anyone, he means anyone. Anyone and everyone. Whosoever, whomsoever.

[13:33] No one is exempt of this free offer. This full and free offer of the gospel. If anyone, he says. If anyone is in Christ. But notice what he actually says.

If anyone. He doesn't say, if anyone comes to church. He doesn't say, if anyone watches online. He doesn't say, if anyone prays, or anyone reads their Bible.

If anyone goes to Sunday school, or if anyone is a church member. If anyone is good enough, or knows enough, or worthy enough. No, he doesn't say that. He says, if anyone is in Christ. If anyone is in Christ.

If anyone is a Christian. If anyone looks to Jesus. If anyone lifts their eyes to Jesus. If anyone lives for Jesus.

If anyone loves Jesus. If anyone leans upon Jesus. If anyone confesses their sin to Jesus. If anyone commits their life to Jesus Christ. They're no longer in Adam.

[14:32] They are now in Christ. That's their new position. So what position are you in? Where is your standing today?

What position are you in? I want you to walk towards this one. I want you to seek Jesus. And make sure that you have a new position.

In Christ. Because the old position. That's death. The new position. As we were saying to the children. It's life. It's new life.

In Christ. And so when you're given a new position. It makes you a new person. When you're given a new position. That makes you a new person.

And that's what we see secondly. So he talks about a new position. In Christ. And then a new person. A new person. He says. If anyone is in Christ.

[15:28] He is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold the new. Has come. And you know. You read this. And you see that this New Year's resolution.

Which Paul is setting before us here. It's life changing. And it has to be life changing. Because. It's not only guaranteeing to us a new position.

He's also assuring us that we will be a new person. A new person. Is that not what we all want at the beginning of a new year? God. We all look at the year that's gone by.

And you know. We begin a new year. And we think. Well I need to be a new person. Need to be made new. Need to have a new beginning. Need to have a new start. Need to have a clean slate. I want to start over.

That's what we often say. I was in the barber yesterday. And that's all they were saying. New Year. New you. New Year. New you. New. New. But you know. You will only really have a new you.

[16:24] When you're in Christ. You'll only have a new position. You'll only be a new person. When you're in Christ. That's what Paul is saying. If anyone is in Christ.

He or she is a new creation. And that word new. It's an amazing word. Paul is saying. You are new of a totally different kind.

New of a totally different quality. New of a totally different value. You are a new creation. You're a new creation. This life changing work.

That takes place in your heart and life. Makes you a new person. It's not a superficial renovation. Where it's just on the outside. And the exterior.

No this is a spiritual transformation. It's not a superficial renovation. It's a spiritual transformation. Yes you'll have the same body.

[17:18] And the same family. And the same job. And the same home. All these things. But on the inside. On the inside. You'll be an entirely new person.

A new creation. And you know what Paul is teaching us here. Simply in verse 17. He's teaching us. About the new birth. He's teaching us what it means to be born again.

Something we've heard so often. And as you know. There wasn't a better teacher on the subject of the new birth. Than Jesus himself. You remember Jesus when he met Nicodemus.

In John chapter 3. They had that night time meeting. Where Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. And Jesus said to Nicodemus. Nicodemus. You must.

You must be born again. Because unless you're born again. You cannot. You cannot enter the kingdom of God. But of course Nicodemus. He struggled with this concept.

[18:17] Because he only thought in terms of a superficial renovation. He only thought in terms of making himself a better person. To be more moral. To be a good person.

You know I hear so many people saying to me that they're a good person. And the Bible says there is none good. But God himself. Because we are all starting in this position.

We're all starting in Adam. But we need to be in Christ. We don't need a superficial renovation. No, no, no. We need a spiritual transformation.

We need to be born again. We need a new birth and a new beginning. We need a new head to see Jesus. We need a new heart to seek Jesus.

We need new hands to serve Jesus. It's not a superficial renovation of the old man. No, it's completely new. It's a spiritual transformation.

[19:15] And it's a work of the Holy Spirit. That's the beauty of it. It's all of God. It's all of grace. Where he works in you to make you a new person.

And that's why Paul says there, The old has passed away. Behold. Stop and look at this. He says, The new has come. As we said, It's new of a totally different kind.

Totally different quality. Totally different value. This is so new. Brand new. And he sets it in contrast to the old.

The old passing away. Getting rid of it. Getting rid of the old slippers. Bringing in the new. And the word old. It's the Greek word archaea.

It's where we get the word archaeology. And as you know, An archaeologist. An archaeologist is someone who digs up fragments of history. They pick up.

[20:17] They dig up bones. Of people. Or animals that have passed away a long time ago. And that's what Paul is stressing here. He's saying that when you're a new person in Christ.

When you're in this new position in Christ. When you're a new creation. Your old life. It's ancient history. Your old life is in the past.

And you need to leave it there, he says. Your old life is gone. It's dead. It's buried. It's passed away. That's how we often describe people who die. We say they pass away.

That's what Paul is saying here. Your old life. It's passed away. The old man in you has died. But behold, the new has come.

And Paul is saying this is what happens when you become a Christian. Your old self. Your old life. Your old lifestyle. It dies. It passes away. It perishes. Because when you experience and enjoy the new birth.

[21 : 20] And a new beginning in Christ. Your old values are no longer valuable. Your old loves are no longer lovely.

Your old beliefs are no longer beautiful. And you know, sometimes when you're thinking, well, how do I know the Lord is working in my life? Are your old values still as valuable?

Are your old loves still as lovely? Are your old beliefs still as beautiful in your life? Are your old passions and your pursuits and your priorities and your practices and your principles and all your plans, are they what you pursue day by day?

Or have they all perished? They're a thing of the past. That's what Paul is saying. When you're a new person, these are a thing of the past. That doesn't mean you're perfect.

Because I'm not perfect. You should know that by now. Far from it. But you know what's amazing is that even when you're a new person, even when you're seeking the Lord and striving to be a new creation in Christ, there will always be trials.

[22 : 38] There will always be temptations to take your focus off Jesus. In fact, it was the Christian apologist C.S. Lewis. He said in relation to this passage, he said, The devil is a grave digger.

And the devil will dig up your past and dig up what you once were. And he will remind you what you once were in Adam.

But, says C.S. Lewis, you must remember that God has buried what you once were in Adam. He's buried it. The devil is a grave digger.

But God has buried what you once were in Adam. You know, my friend, when you're born again, you become a new creation in Christ. You're a new person. You have a new position.

And that new birth and that new beginning, it should affect every area of your life. It should affect every area and avenue of your life. It shouldn't be just this little religion box that we have where we read our Bible and we regularly pray and we reschedule our timetable to try and include coming to church on Sunday and midweek.

[23 : 50] Of course, it should affect all these areas of our life. But what Paul is talking about, it's much, much more than that. When you experience this spiritual transformation in your heart and life, when you become a new person in Christ, it should affect every area, every avenue of your life.

It should affect your relationships, your relationships with your spouse or your family or your siblings or your friends. It should affect your work, your witness and your worship.

It should affect your character, your conduct, your conversation, your commitment to Jesus Christ. It should affect your time and your talents and your tithing. It should affect your devotion and your discipleship and your discipline.

My friend, when you become a new person in Christ, it should affect every area and avenue of your life. Because when you're in Christ, everything is about Christ.

When you are in Christ, everything should be about Christ. He should be first and foremost. You should be last and least.

[25 : 02] He must increase. We must decrease. He must have the supremacy. We are to have submission. And you know, what Paul makes absolutely clear here is that when you're a new person with a new position in Christ, when you're a new creation, when you're a Christian, the old has to go in order for the new to come.

The old has to go and the new has to come. Because if the new comes, but the old doesn't go, then that's not only a concern.

That's a contradiction. That's hypocrisy. And there's one thing the Christian cannot be. As the Bible teaches us, the Christian can't be a hypocrite. The Christian can't be a hypocrite.

That's what the Christian is often accused of. Being a hypocrite. But the Christian isn't to live with the new while still holding on to the old.

The Christian is not to love God and then live as they please. No, Paul says, verse 17, our resolution. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

[26 : 15] The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. This New Year's resolution, it's life-changing. Because when you resolve to follow Christ, it's a resolution that will give you a new position.

It'll make you a new person and set before you a new purpose. It's a resolution that will give you a new position. It will make you a new person and set before you a new purpose.

And that's what we see lastly. A new purpose. A new purpose. He says there in verse 17,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

I love Paul's letters. Because when you read them, you see that they are written by an experienced pastor and preacher.

[27 : 28] And you see that because from verse 17, then into verse 18 and 19, Paul moves on from information to application. Paul moves from just giving us the illustration to now applying it to our life.

Because Paul has explained that this New Year's resolution, it's life-changing. It makes you a new person. It gives you a new position in Christ. And it's all because, as he says there in verses 18 and 19, it's all because Christ has reconciled you.

Christ has redeemed you. He's brought you back. Christ has restored your relationship with God.

But now Paul says that this life-changing resolution, it has also given you a new purpose.

You have a new purpose in your life. And that new purpose is a ministry and message of reconciliation. That's your new purpose. A ministry and message of reconciliation.

Paul says in verse 18, God has given us a ministry of reconciliation. Then in verse 19, Paul says, God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation.

[28 : 37] So we have a ministry and a message. We have a ministry and a message. As a new person with a new position in Christ, this life-changing resolution has given us a new purpose.

It has given you a ministry and message of reconciliation. Which means that as a Christian, you're a minister. As a Christian, you are a minister.

The word minister means to serve. It doesn't mean you're going to stand in the pulpit. If you want to stand in the pulpit, you are welcome to stand here every week. But as a Christian, you're a minister. And you're a minister within your own sphere and your own circle of life.

As a Christian, you have a ministry. Because as a Christian, you have a ministry to your family and to your friends. As a Christian parent, you have a ministry to your children.

As a Christian neighbor, you have a ministry to your community. As a Christian colleague, you have a ministry in your own workplace. You might be the only Christian in your workplace. As a Christian, you have a ministry and you have a message.

[29 : 49] A message of reconciliation. Therefore, he says, verse 20, we are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us.

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. So as a Christian, Paul says, as a Christian, you have a new purpose.

You have a ministry and a message of reconciliation. Because wherever you go and whatever you do in a week, from one Lord's Day to the next Lord's Day, you are an ambassador for Christ.

You are a representative of Jesus Christ. You are a witness for Jesus Christ. You have this new purpose. That's your ministry and your message, which God is making, as Paul says, God is making his appeal through you.

You are his mouthpiece. You are his witness. You are his feet. You are his hands. You are his mouth. He is making his appeal through you, through your Christian character, your conduct, your conversation, and your commitment, whether it's in the congregation or in the community, and your message.

[30 : 57] Paul says, your message as a new person with a new position and a new purpose, your message to those who are still outside of Christ, those still in this position in Adam, your message is, I implore you.

I beg you. I urge you. That's what Paul, the language Paul is using. I plead with you. I pray for you that you will be reconciled to God, that you too will be in Christ, that you, my neighbor, will become

a new creation, that you, my children, will become little Christians following Jesus, that you, my work colleague, will confess your sin and commit your life to the Savior, that you will look to Jesus and lift your eyes to Jesus and live for Jesus and love Jesus and lean upon Jesus.

Why? And how does he conclude the chapter? Verse 21. Why are we to do this? Why do we have a new position? Why are we a new person? Why do we have a new purpose?

All because for our sake, for our sake, he, God the Father, made him, Jesus Christ, to be sin. He made him to be the last Adam.

He made him to bear our sin and die in our place so that in him we would become the righteousness of God.

[32 : 39] God the Father, what a new year's resolution. What a new year's resolution. It's a life-changing resolution when you resolve to follow it.

It's a life-changing resolution when you resolve to follow it. It's a resolution that will give you a new position. It'll make you a new person and it will set before you a new purpose.

New purpose in life. So surely that's a resolution worth committing to as we go into 2024. This new year's resolution, if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation.

The old has passed away. It's gone. The new has come. Make that your new year's resolution for 2024.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for Thy Word, that Thy Word is so relevant, it's so readable and that we're able to come to it and see that God is speaking to us.

[34 : 02] And Lord, our prayer is that as Thou hast spoken this morning, we pray that we would respond, respond in faith and obedience to Thy truth. And Lord, help us, we pray.

Help us to live lives as those in a new position and made a new person with a new purpose in life. Help us, Lord, to have that ministry of reconciliation and to see that it is all for the glory of God and the furtherance of His kingdom.

Bless, Lord, Thy truth to us. Keep us, we ask. Watch over us in the week that lies ahead. A week, Lord, as we often say, is unknown to us. But Lord, we give thanks that we have begun it here in the Lord's house.

on the Lord's day. Cleanse us, and we pray. Keep us, we ask, for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning.

We're going to sing the words of Psalm 119. Psalm 119, we're singing at verse 57 down to the verse mark 60.

[35 : 11] Psalm 119, it's page 404 in the blue psalm book. Psalm 119.

As we mentioned before, Psalm 118, it's the longest, longest chapter in the Bible. It's the longest psalm in the Psalter. And it's a psalm that emphasizes the importance of God's word in our life. And that's what the psalmist is saying here. He resolves, he makes a resolution to keep God's word. That's what he says in verse 57.

He says, That's his resolution to follow God's word.

With my whole heart I did entreat thy face and favor free according to thy gracious word. Be merciful to me. We'll sing on down to the verse mark 60 of Psalm 119.

[36 : 12] And we'll stand to sing if you're able to God's praise. Thou might your portion are alone which I did choose, O Lord, I have resolved and said that I would keep thy holy word.

With my whole heart I did entreat thy face and favor free.
according to my gracious word.

Be merciful to me. I thought I thought upon my former ways and did my life well try I and have I did not stay nor linger long As those that saw full are

But hastily I lost to keep Myself I did repair The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all, now and forevermore.

[39 : 01] Amen. Amen.