

SERMON FOR NEW YEARS' EVE – 12/31/2020

Colossians 2:6, 7 “The Christian’s New Years’ Resolution”

[6] So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

It is at this time of the year, that many people make their annual New Years’ Resolutions. Resolutions are made regarding what a person is going to eat or drink, or how much he/she is not going to eat or drink; some resolve to stop smoking; to be better husbands and wives; to spend more time with the family. Some resolutions are more like goals for the coming year: you resolve to get so much remodeling done on your home; to sell so many vacuum cleaners; to buy a car; to sell so much insurance; to expand the farm by so many acres, and so on...

However, for the most part, before the New Year is very old, most of these resolutions have already been broken. They often fall by the wayside because we simply do not have the will power or desire to keep them on our own.

The close of one year and the start of another is also a good time for the Christian to take a spiritual inventory of him/herself. It is a good time for us to examine our lives and see how we have responded to the love which God has showered upon us in the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is a good time to do some soul searching.

- Have I this past year been everything that God might rightfully expect of me?
- Have I let my light shine before men so that they may see my good works done to the glory of God?
- Have I always functioned as the **‘salt of the earth and the light of the world?’**

It is a good time to take inventory – a time to repent of past failures and neglects; a time to resolve, **with God’s help**, to do better in the future. Let’s not overlook the words: **‘with God’s help’**. The power to do better in 2021 – the power to live a sanctified, God pleasing life does not lie within us. It must come to us from on high.

The Apostle Paul writes: **“So, then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord...”**

- By faith, worked in us by the Holy Spirit, we have received Christ as our personal Savior.
- By faith, we have become partakers of the blessings and promises of God in Christ: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.
- By faith, we have been made new creatures.

All of this then becomes the motivating force and power in our lives, and this enables us to lead the kind of lives that God expects of us. Yes, as children of God we respond to the love of God – not with our own strength, but with God’s help, and we make full use of the power which He alone supplies. Keeping this thought in mind, that all we do in the coming year can only be done with God’s help – we are going to make a threefold New Year’s Resolution which is suggested by our text for tonight. May this serve as your New Year’s Resolution: 1. To Live in Christ; 2. To Grow in Faith; 3. To Overflow with Thankfulness.

I. To Live in Christ.

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him...” Notice upon what the emphasis is being placed: it falls on the necessity of clinging to Christ the Lord. Paul is telling these Colossian Christians, as he is telling us today: *“Let your life, your conduct in life, continue to be in harmony with the fact that you have received Christ as your Savior.”* And so, tonight, as we usher in the year 2021, let us resolve:

- “I will live my life, with God’s help, according to His Word, in which His Will for my life is revealed.
- I resolve to let my light shine before the world, that others may see my good works and glorify my Father in heaven.
- I will strive to avoid doing or saying anything that will bring shame upon the name of my Lord.” (Think about what a difference this would make in the world!)

I am also sure that as each of us makes just such a resolution, we mean it most sincerely, with all our heart.

And yet, even as we make this solemn resolution, we are even now aware of the Old Adam within us. We perhaps recall the many good intentions we had for 2020, intentions which still remain unfulfilled today. We are painfully aware of the fact that our life in Christ has not always kept pace with our profession of Christ. It is indeed one thing to say “I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior.” It is another thing to let that confession influence what I say and what I do with my life.

But my friends, as our failures and shortcomings stare us in the face, let us not give up; let us not despair. Part of living in Christ involves recognizing our shortcomings. It involves being able to say, "I am a sinner! I cannot live in Christ on my own power." And just such a confession drives us to the open arms of our Savior who says, "**Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**" You see, His blood, shed on Calvary's Cross, has also washed us clean from these sins of failure and neglect. Living in Christ involves receiving His strength and help to make the journey through life. May our resolution then be that we will turn to the Lord and His Word for advice, for guidance, for help and strengthening as we journey through life with Him.

II. To Grow in Faith

But Paul has more to say – another resolution for us to consider: "**so then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught.**" What child of God does not desire the firm faith which Paul here describes and which he encourages us to display! Note the comparison Paul draws:

- As a tree sends its roots deep into the earth in order to draw nourishment; as the winds and storms cause the tree to cling to its anchor in the soil, so we shall be rooted in Christ, drawing our power from him, and clinging firmly to Him when the winds and storms of adversity blow in.
- As a tall building rests safely upon a solid foundation, so our faith is secure against the storms of life because it is built upon Christ! Who of us here tonight will not say, "That's the kind of faith I will have in 2021!"

But before we place undue emphasis upon the "I" in this resolution – let's remember the words which we memorized in Luther's explanation of the 3rd Article of the Apostles' Creed: "*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel...*" The faith that we have is a gift from God the Holy Spirit who works through the Word. It is the Gospel that brings us to faith; and it is the Gospel that nourishes and strengthens our faith and causes it to grow.

Our resolution then to grow in faith encourages us to be diligent hearers of God's Word.

- May we faithfully read and study that Word in our homes;
- May we take advantage of every opportunity to hear that Word proclaimed in our churches;
- May we be eager to sit down together in our council meetings, ladies meetings, confirmation, Sunday School and Bible Classes – yes, sit down together and consider what God has to say to us in His Word. It is by this means, the Gospel – in Word and Sacrament – that we will be enabled to grow in faith in the year ahead!

III. Overflow with Thankfulness

Paul has one more resolution for us to briefly consider: "**so then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.**" Have we perhaps in the past unconsciously gotten into the habit of complaining and finding fault, of seeing only the dark side of things; of being ungrateful and dissatisfied? If so, then let us take this resolution to heart.

- Let 2021 be a year in which we count our blessings instead of our deficits,
- a year in which we become truly thankful for all the things that God has given us;
- a year in which we excel in expressing our gratitude and thankfulness to God.

This, my friends, is an art that can be learned! We can learn it at the feet of Jesus! Lost and condemned creatures that we are, it is at the feet of Christ that we have experienced an almost unbelievable measure of grace and mercy.

- God's Son gave Himself for us;
 - We have been free from the curse of sin and the sting of death;
 - We are God's children;
 - We are heirs of heaven.
 - Even our crosses and trials are a blessing, as God promises that they too will work out for our eternal good.
- May we tonight and always be moved to cry out with the Psalmist: "**O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy endures forever.**"

The Apostle Paul says: "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!**" In and through Christ Jesus these resolutions – to live in Christ, to grow in faith, and to overflow with thankfulness – can be more than empty words or pious wishes. They can be prayers put into action in our lives! May God grant this for Jesus' sake.

Amen.