

# Gospel Resolution

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I'll bet some of you have made resolutions for the new year—to lose weight *or* to eat the right stuff *or* to stop losing your temper on the highways and the byways around Chicago. (Good luck with that one.)

It's a new year. It's a chance to make yourself better. It's time for a fresh start. The voices around us are abuzz with advice on how best to do this—how to be better in the future. It seems that we all know—both Christian and non-Christian—that we could and should be better than we are. (Why is that? What in us longs for a change? Why all this resolve to be better? These are questions worth asking yourself.)

This is nothing new. In the first-century, Paul wrote a letter to the Colossians because they were being told they needed to change; they were being told how they could do better than they were currently doing—how they could find spiritual peace, how they could achieve spiritual enlightenment. The voices about them were abuzz: *You'll have to do better to be better! You need to change!*

In the midst of all this clamor, let's hear what Paul had to say to the Colossians and, also, has to say to us amongst the buzzing voices of our day.

Let's read God's word together.

## **Colossians 3:1-17**

**3** 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 also 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 Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup>And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

<sup>15</sup>Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. <sup>17</sup>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.

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I think I have failed at keeping every new year's resolution I have ever made. Oh, I may do well for a while—in fact, I usually do—but, in the end, I lose my way. I start going to the gym and lose a couple of pounds then, however, life gets hectic, and I stop going and gain it all back. I begin reading my Bible in Genesis meditating upon each text digging into the deeper meaning; but, in a few weeks, I'm just rifling through it trying to mark it off my checklist.

Does this sound familiar? I'll bet it does.

Another thing about resolutions is that they always work from our deficiencies and not our sufficiencies. What do I mean? Well, when we make a new resolution, we're typically trying to become what we aren't, not reveal what we are. It's usually about changing not magnifying our identity.

- We recognize we're a bit sloppy, and so we vow to be more organized.
- We realize we're just puttering thru life—being pushed this way or that way by whatever comes up—thus, we resolve to be more mindful, to live our lives to the fullest, and to not be so easily distracted.

- We look at our spending and notice we're not very good at keeping a budget; so, we promise ourselves we'll tighten the belt and save more money.

None of these are bad things to aim at. In fact, the ones just listed are all good. Nevertheless, they all work out of a desire to change, *not reveal*, our identity.

In today's text, Paul urges change, but tells us our transformation must emerge from a very different motivation. To see what Paul means, we'll ask two questions of this passage: (1<sup>st</sup>) **What needs to change?** and (2<sup>nd</sup>) **How do we change?**

### 1. What needs to change?

All of us have fallen in love with some trending fashion and jumped headfirst into it—skinny jeans, ripped jeans, stone-washed jeans *or* button-down collar shirts, band collar shirts, butterfly collar shirts *or* think hippy to hipster, gangster to grunge, valley to VSCO girl. We're all implicated in some way, *right?! If you try to deny it, I'll bet I could thumb through your old photos and discover evidence to the contrary. Just own-up to your bad fashion decisions, my friends.*

Did you notice Paul wants to talk fashion here? He wants believers to take-off and throw-away bad fashion choices and put-on a fashion with permanent swagger. Look at how he describes this moral fashion transformation.

*[Take-off] whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices (vv. 5-9).*

These are the shameful fashion decisions of our old sin nature. They are ugly. They are embarrassing. We didn't know these were such bad moral fashion choices before we knew Christ Jesus, but we do now. So, Paul tells us to throw them away—to put them in the burn-barrel and set them on fire.

Paul tells us to put-on the new and spotless wardrobe which we've been given by Jesus Christ. He tells us we'll never look at these new clothes with embarrassment or shame. This new look will suite us forever.

Listen to what he urges us to put-on.

*...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.... And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (vv. 12-14).*

Friends, the apostle couldn't be clearer about how we should adorn ourselves. He urges us to put on-virtues and take off-vices. God, through Paul, commands this. And, most of us want to be characterized by such virtues. In fact, largely, in our time, people want this kind of character. If you went out on the street and asked all those who passed-by whether they'd like to be seen as compassionate and kind and humble and gentle and patient, I believe the answer would largely be yes.

Why, then, does such a virtuous character seem so allusive? Why is it so hard for us to put-on these characteristics? Why isn't there more compassion and kindness and humility around today?

Or, a more important question for us to ask today is—*Why doesn't the church look any different (when it comes to these kinds of virtues) than the world around it? Why don't we look terribly different than our non-Christian neighbors?* (For, sadly, we have to admit we often don't appear any different at all.)

And, because of this, we have to ask our final question.

## **2. How do we change?**

Well, to begin, we'll have to recognize that we can't make this kind of change on our own. If we try, it'll simply be another resolution that, by February, ends-up in the dumpster. And, if you don't believe me, then have at it. Try and put them on! See if you can put-off the vices and, simultaneously, put-on these virtues. In the end, I bet you'll find yourself frustrated (e.g. Benjamin Franklin).

No, we're not able to perfect ourselves by our own strength.

Paul, however, tells us there is a way. In this passage, he emphasizes a power through which believers can put-on the virtues and put-off the vices. Listen closely to Paul's language here. It highlights the only way forward.

- *...you have been raised with Christ (v. 1).*
- *...you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God (v. 3).*

- *[Christ] is your life* (v. 4).
- *[You are] God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved...* (v. 12).
- *[You are] members of one body [in Christ]* (v. 15).

Paul says this is who you are. Paul says this is your identity. *So, go live it out!* Don't look back. Don't return to old ways. *You're a new creature!*

If you're like me, then sometimes you lookback at the past with a sick longing. You lookback upon your non-Christian past through a pair of rose-colored-glasses—remembering freedoms and remembering pleasures and remembering experiences as if they were all perfectly satisfying, as if you were happy before you trusted Christ. But friends, those are lies. That's not who you were. And, if we're being truly honest, that's not who you want to be now.

Brothers and sisters, this text tells us to stop looking-back with a sick longing. This text says to stop acting like your old sinful-self. Paul says that *that* person died. When you trusted in Jesus, your old worldly-self was nailed to the cross with Christ, and you now have a new life—a totally new identity—thru the resurrection of Jesus. You are not sinful. You are not common. You're not controlled by worldly appetites. So, stop acting as if you were. *Live out your new identity in Christ!*

How does change happen? It happens as you trust in the power of Jesus in you and embrace your true identity in Christ. It happens as you believe that you're a child of God and begin living as such—not by your own power but by his power in you. That's how we change.

***We don't change by becoming what we aren't but by becoming what we are.*** We're transformed by resolving, in Christ, to be the sons and the daughters of God—a redeemed and divine people. That's who you are in Christ.

The apostle Peter also sings of our new identity through faith in Christ:

*...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy* (1 Peter 2:9-10).

And then, just after he encourages us with these amazing words of affirmation, Peter commands us to live-out this new identity by putting-off those old sinful vices and by putting-on Christlike virtues. Live-out your true identity, Peter tells us.

Friends, this is a gospel resolution for a new year and for a lifetime. Amen.