

FIGHTING FOR WHAT MATTERS THE MOST

❖ NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS – GOOD OR BAD?

I have never taught on making New Year's resolutions simply because statistics reveal that only about 4% of the people who make them actually keep them, and most of the resolutions are related to getting healthier, stop smoking, or losing weight. So, if you do choose to make a New Year's resolution, I doubt seriously that you will make it to the end of the year. In fact, research indicates that the majority of people who make resolutions on January 1 actually start waving the white flag by January 10 and call it quits.

I say all of that because by the time that I get through with this message today, I do not want you think that I am trying to casually coerce you into making a lot of New Year's resolutions. I almost think that would be futile. I have been trying to do that all year, so this is sort of a continuum of what we have already been doing. For the past year, I have been teaching you on how to think, and specifically to learn and discipline yourself to think like God thinks. That is an enormous issue in your life. If you do not think doing that is all that important, then I seriously doubt that I can ever help you in any way. Why would I say that? Well, it is because life is always about growing, about learning, about adjusting, and about changing. We are to always be **“growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ”**, and that involves all of the above. However, having said all of that, I do want this message to at least challenge you to assess whether or not there really are some things in your life that clearly need to change and be adjusted so that your life reflects Christ more than it does today. This assessment would clearly include every critical area of your life such as relational issues, moral issues, self-control issues, physical issues, and most of all spiritual issues.

If you have decided in the past to go back and make an assessment of whether or not you have done that – made adjustments in critical areas of your life, I wonder how many of you could honestly and transparently say that you actually did. You can tell me all day long that there are things in your life – attitudes, behaviors, habits, etc., that need to change, but have they changed, and do you even want to make the effort to change what you know needs to be changed? That is the litmus test. If we know that there are areas of our life that God wants to change, but we never change, then we probably have some serious spiritual problems. To begin with, we would be very deceived because we have convinced ourselves that what we think is better than what God thinks. Good luck with that.

So, the question is simple – *“Have you begun to make the adjustments that you need to make in your life to be the kind of Christian that God wants you to be?”* Let me say all of this in another way. *“Are you willing to fight the battles that matter the most in your life?”* I say this as graciously as I know how, but if you do not believe that there is anything in your life that needs to change, then in all likelihood, you have been greatly deceived by the enemy. What is needed is really very simple.

If you want to see different results in your life, then you have to do things differently than you have been doing them.¹

¹ Groeschel, Fight, 145.

There is no way around this because spiritual maturity does not just happen. It is not accidental. I am always intrigued by people who want to see different results in their life, but they are not willing to do anything differently than what they have been doing. They want everyone else to change, but not themselves. This is not brain surgery, but just divine common sense. I have been thinking recently about how toxic our world has become. Mentally, morally, and spiritually it seems that life is being impacted at every level. We are seeing before our very eyes the reality of what Paul taught in [2 Timothy 3:1-5](#) when he said,

2Ti 3:1 (NKJV) But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

That is a very toxic list of attributes that God says will continue to contaminate our lives if we are not careful. When I read a verse like this, I am quickly reminded of [Galatians 5:9](#) that says,

Gal 5:9 (NKJV) A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

I mean, just a little bit of just one of these things in your life has the potential to completely ruin or destroy some part of your life. Just take “**unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, and without self-control**” for beginners. Then to make things even worse, we all have this uncanny ability to deceive ourselves into believing that everyone else is wrong and that we are always right. We all know too well from personal experience what [Jeremiah 17: 9](#) says,

Jer 17:9 (NKJV) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

If you understand anything about English grammar, you know that the question “**who can know it**” is a rhetorical question. It is actually saying that none of us can know how deceitful and even wicked our heart can be at times. For instance, we may think that it is okay to be getting angry all the time and saying things that hurt people, but the truth of the matter is that the longer that happens, the easier it is for us to believe that ridiculous lie. In the process, we are always suppressing the truth – always. We are doing what we know God does not want us to do, then finding a way to either justify what we are doing or simply ignoring what is wrong in our life. It is as if we are more comfortable in elevating what is not true vs. what is true just so that we can justify how we are living. That is a very bad choice.

Probably the most important thing that you can do when this is happening is to simply examine every area of your life in a fairly drastic way.² [2 Corinthians 13:5](#) says it this way,

2Co 13:5 (NKJV) Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified.

I have said this often throughout our study this past year, but please listen to those who love you when they are trying to tell you that there is something wrong in your life that simply needs some correction. Do not ignore what other people may say about your life. [1 John 1:8](#) says,

² Groeschel, Soul, 27.

1Jn 1:8 (NKJV) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

I think what this verse is talking about is self-deception – “**we deceive ourselves**”. I.e., we are more than willing to find a way to weasel out of what is wrong in our life, and somehow blame it on someone else. We make excuses, we develop rationalizations, we inappropriately justify, we defend our shortcomings to the bitter end. Every single one of us have areas of our life like this that we need to adjust, to change, or to remove. So, when someone close to you says that there is something in your life that needs to be adjusted, simply bounce it off of your close friends and ask them if they see the same thing. Ask them to be totally honest. Listen to your marriage partner when they are consistently saying that something in your life needs to change.³ These are some of the major ways that God actually speaks to us – through other people. He certainly speaks to you through His Word. There is no escaping that reality. However, I think that is one reason why so many people have forsaken spending time in the Word. It is because they already know that there are things in their life that need to change, and when they go to the Word, they are confronted with what God says needs to change in their life so that they can glorify Him in their life. For instance, [Proverbs 15:31-32](#) says.

Pr 15:31 (NKJV) The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. ³² He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding.

In fact, when taking the Lord’s Supper, [1 Corinthians 11:28](#) says to do this before we actually participate in that sacred event.

1Co 11:28 (NKJV) But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

The point is very simple. It is critical to your spiritual health and vitality that you examine your personal life – how you talk to people, how you relate to people, what kind of fellowship that you have with God - in essence how you live. It is examining what is important to you in your life and whether what is important to you is actually important to God. What was important to the Pharisees was not important to God. What was important to the rich young ruler was not important to God. What was important to the man who wanted to build bigger barns was not important to God. They all had life upside down.

You have to take a brutally honest look at your life, but very few people ever do. You have to look at your personal life with its attitudes, decisions, and perspectives, and see what it is that may be crippling your life, what it is that is destroying parts of your life, what it is that is hurting your life and probably the lives of other people in the process. We often just flatter ourselves and deceive ourselves into thinking that we have nothing to change, but we all know that is a lie. We all have areas of our life to change – no matter how good or godly we believe ourselves to be.

Over the years, I have taught you that every day counts, but I would probably be better off saying that “everything counts”. The way that we think, the way that we talk, how we spend our time, how we spend our resources, the way that we live – it all has a bearing on our spiritual life.⁴ Just for instance, as parents, we are always teaching our children something by the way that we behave when they misbehave. Every day counts and so does everything else.

³ Groeschel, Soul, 29-30, 34.

⁴ Groeschel, Soul, 16.

It is really amazing to me how afraid so many Christians are of the truth and of what God says is the very best for their life. We unnecessarily wrestle with God in areas of our life that we clearly know He wants to change, and in the process, we end up redefining the truth to suit our disposition and our lifestyle and our personal desires. I have always been intrigued with how Paul saw his life in [1 Corinthians 15:31](#) when he said.

1Co 15:31 (NKJV) I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

Jesus made this even more pointed when He said in [Luke 9:23](#),

Lk 9:23 (NKJV) Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

When I read the word “**daily**” in both of those verses, I realize that I have a lot of work to do in my life. I have to always be evaluating and assessing where I am in my Christian life every day and whether it is even close to where God wants me to be. Jesus made the fundamental rules of the Christian life very simple when He condensed the Christian life into two simple commands in [Matthew 22:36-39](#),

Mt 22:36 (NKJV) "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" ³⁸ **This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'**

Love God deeply, love other people deeply. Let us just assume that your life is not headed in the right direction and when you do an honest assessment and evaluation that it is clear that you need to make some changes toward becoming what Gods wants you to become. So, at that point, what do you have to do? Honestly, the answer to that question is really very simple. **You have to turn around and start heading your life in another direction.** So, just apply that to your Christian life.

If what you are doing in your life is always moving you in the direction of sin, then make the right decision to change that direction. Turn around and go in the right direction.

If you were driving somewhere and suddenly realized that you were headed in the wrong direction to reach your destination, what would you do? Well, if you were smart, you would make a U-turn and head back in the right direction.

You can never get to where God wants you to be until you are willing to make the necessary changes in your life that He wants you to make – and most often that always means changing the direction of some key areas of your life.

The more you fight against making the obvious changes that need to be made in your life, the more difficult the mental and spiritual battle becomes, and the more easily ungodly “**strongholds**” will be developed in your life. You cannot stop this building of “**strongholds**” from happening if you are always resisting doing what God wants you to do. Do you need to make some New Year’s resolutions to adjust various areas of your life? If you are like the rest of us, you probably do. However, it will most likely not work out for you until you decide that you have to win the battles in your life that matter the most to God. **Most people are fighting the most for what they want the most, and not what God wants the most for them.** They are things like your relationship with God, your relationship with other people

(love God, love people). They are things like moral purity, honesty, integrity, commitment to Christ, commitment to your family, and commitment to the Word of God.

I am convinced that no one, either lost or saved, sits around and tries to figure out how they can ruin their life, but that is actually the problem. They just keep doing what they have always done and simply are not willing to begin to make an assessment of where their life is actually headed. Christians are just as guilty of this as anyone. I have said it many times, but for the most part, everyone is a by-product of the choices that they have made in their life. Some young person decided that it was okay to start smoking and drinking and partying with his friends. I saw a young man I know this past week and we were just casually talking and I asked him what he was going to be doing this weekend for New Years and he casually remarked “*partying with my friends*”. I interpret that as being vastly different than him saying “*spending some meaningful and godly time with my friends*”. Some parent never gave it a second thought of the impact their smoking and drinking was ultimately going to make on their children who have watched them for years. Some man struggling in his marriage decides that it is okay to casually look at pornography on the Internet, but he never understands the stranglehold and the stronghold that ungodly habit will eventually have on both his life and his marriage. Some person has never learned how to defer and compromise on the little things in life, and suddenly he finds himself unable to ever resolve any conflict that happens in his life. We all are the by-product of our choices – either good or bad. Listen to one of God’s spiritual laws that neither you or I will ever be able to change just because we may not like the results of what has transpired or is transpiring in our life. Paul said these words in [Galatians 6:7-9](#),

Gal 6:7 (NKJV) Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Here we are again at that crossroads called “Being Self-Deceived”. God is simply saying that if you are not willing to evaluate where your life is actually headed by the decisions that you make, that you will have no control over the eventual consequences. If you continue to just think however you want to think rather than how God wants you to think, then please do not blame God when life does not work out as you planned. **If God says or even implies in His word that something is wrong, then it is wrong, and you have to make a choice that you will not do what you know is wrong and displeasing to Him.** The problem is really very simple at this point. You can refuse to make the necessary changes in your life that coincide with God’s Word, and when that happens, sin wins and you lose. If you have ever studied the laws of sowing and reaping, you always reap more than you sow – either good or bad. You always reap later than you sow. You always reap the same kind as you sow. The bottom line is simple – you always reap what you sow and if you sow to the flesh, if you live your life just doing what you want to do rather than how God wants you to live, then please do not blame God when the final reaping comes in to haunt you.

The word “**corruption**” simply means to be doing things in your life that will bring you into a lower state, bring you into a worse state, and often times into a non-recoverable state. For me, v9 is just pregnant with truth, and maybe the best way to characterize what it says is so simple that we can easily just miss the point. **Just do what is right, just do what is good, just do what you know deep down**

that God wants you to do. If you are playing darts, that would be called a “bullseye”. If you were playing baseball, that would be called a “grand slam”. If you are living out the Christian life, that would be called “**loving God with all of your heart and mind and soul and strength**”. Let me give you three good seeds to sow in your life. These are very simple, and generally they are the ones that we do not pay much attention to, but trust me, the simpler the principles, the better for you.

1. **Do not let other people drag you down into sin.** If you know that something is wrong, do not let other people pull you into their sin. For me, it does not matter who it is – a family member, a great friend, or someone you do not even know. Just do not let other people influence you in the wrong direction. The Bible is very clear that the wrong kind of friends and company that you may choose to hang out with will eventually corrupt your morals and your life. Bad influences can often be very difficult to recognize, so just be careful. I sincerely believe that if someone is beginning to have a bad influence on your life that the Holy Spirit will let you know what is happening, so do not ignore Him when He speaks to you.
2. **Maintain the highest standards and convictions possible for your life.** Always speak the truth in love. Be intensely faithful to your marriage partner. Love your children with all of your heart and raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Always be honest. Live a life of purity and not impurity. Be a fully committed follower of Jesus Christ. Love God, love His Word, love His people, love His church. It is very important that you let other people know exactly what your standards and convictions actually are, so simply live out the gospel in front of people, and when necessary, use words to let them know what you believe and what your standards and convictions actually are. Never compromise on what you know is God’s best for your life, because when you do, you are allowing the enemy to destroy valuable parts of your life.
3. **Do not allow anything or anyone move you away from what you know is right before God.** Stand your ground, “**be strong in the Lord**”, “**hold fast to that which is good and abhor evil**”. Fight for the things that have eternal value and mean the most for your life and for those you love. Always be fighting the good fight of faith. Flee from sin. Flee sexual immorality. Flee idolatry. Scripture says to “**Flee these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness**” ([1 Timothy 6:11](#)). Every day let your life be engaged in this ongoing battle.⁵

Trust me, but the moment that you decide to be a fully committed follower of Jesus Christ no matter what the cost, you can be assured that the enemy will give you all the alternatives, rationalizations, and excuses that you could ever want to continue living your life just as you please.⁶ He will tell you that you cannot train an old dog to do new tricks, or that you have always been this way and it has not been that bad, or that you are making too big of a deal of all of this. He will entice you, urge you, and prompt you to do your own thing because you need to live your life however you want to live it. He will tell you that that is the best thing for your life. The truth of the matter is that “**the devil is a liar and the father of lies**”, and whenever you buy into his deception, it always brings your life into a lesser state.

⁵ Groeschel, Soul, 205.

⁶ Groeschel, Soul, 229.

Well, the New Year starts today – January 1, 2023. So, I wonder what kind of choices you will make to become that fully devoted follower of Christ, or will you choose to not make any important adjustments this year and to just continue to live as you please. Well, I guess we will have to wait until this time next year to find out how all of that will work itself out in your life. My final encouragement is to simply choose to become all that God wants you to be, and then live every day as if it is your last. May God bless you this year in ways that you never dreamed were possible because you finally made that willful choice to think and live as God wants you to think and live.

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