

THE OLD AND THE NEW

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The “New Year” is at hand; and the time by common consent sacred to the formation of new resolutions. In most cases, however, the resolutions of the previous year have the dust brushed off from them, and are made to serve again, being just as good as new on account of never having been used.

There is a difference of opinion as to the value of making resolutions at any time. It is not our promises that save us, but the promises of God. Making good resolutions often tends directly against real improvement, since the resolution is taken as a substitute for action. A man makes a resolution and breaks it, and then when he is confronted with his failure, he makes another, or repeats the former one with new emphasis, and straightway his conscience is at rest. The resolution is accepted as an “indulgence.” In saying this we do not in the least discount a fixed choice, nor a firm purpose to cleave to the Lord; but the penitent who makes real progress is the one who comes to the Lord, saying,—

“No preparation can I make,
My best resolves I only break,
Yet save me for Thine own name’s sake,
And take me as I am.”

Yet allowing the most that might be claimed for good resolutions, the custom of having one special day for making reformation, out of three hundred and sixty-five, is most pernicious. It is often the case that people wait for months till the New Year to “turn over a new leaf.” This evil habit is fostered by religious papers and teachers who make so much of the New Year as the fit time for reflecting over the past and making a fresh start. From such talk people get the idea that there’s something sacred about New Year’s day.

This evil would be avoided if they would remember that the first day of January is no more the beginning of a new year than is the third of March, the 13th of June, the 19th of October, or any other day of any other month in the year. Every day is just one year from three hundred and sixty-five days before, and so every day begins a new year. Whatever is fit and especially appropriate for the first day of a new year, may be attended to at any time. Are you convinced of the

error of your ways, and impressed that you ought to reform? Then never think of waiting for the first day of January to come. "Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation." 2 Cor. 6:2.

As to the date of the New Year, it is purely arbitrary, and is not the same in all parts of the world. In England, until the adoption of the Gregorian calendar, in 1752, the legal and ecclesiastical year began at March 25. This was more nearly the original time of beginning the year, as directed by the Lord. The spring of the year is the natural season. To begin a new year in the beginning of winter is as senseless and arbitrary as to begin a new day in the middle of the night. As a matter of convenience in reckoning, and for business purposes, the 1st of January is as good as any other day; but no one should think that any sort of sacredness attaches to it, or that it is any better than any other day for ceasing to do evil and learning to do well.

The false idea concerning the 1st of January, which is due chiefly to the Roman Catholic Church, has led to what are known as "watch night" services by many people. They assemble in a meeting-house on the last day in December, and remain together until after midnight, to "watch the old year out, and the new year in." There would be something irresistibly funny in this performance, even if the first day of the year were sacred by Divine appointment. For since the last day begins at sunset, it is evident that the new year must also begin at sunset, with the day. So that when people watch till midnight to see the new year in, they are like men who watch for a train that has passed eight hours before.

It is stated on good authority that the term "watch night" originated with Wesley, but not with any reference to the New Year. That godly man was accustomed to spend much time in prayer, and would often, with a company of his people, spend the entire night in prayer. Thus they "watched" the night through. Not that they were watching the hours as they passed, but that they were watching with the Lord. The thought came from the Saviour's words to His disciples on the night of His betrayal, "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?" and, "Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation." If there were more of this sort of watching every day in the year, there would be less superstition concerning one particular day.

It is perhaps safe to say that without doubt all those who will make New Year's will after time have broken them. But that is not at

all strange, for it is the peculiar characteristic of human resolutions, that they break very easily.

“You wouldn’t have people stop making resolutions, would you?” some one asks. Certainly. The Lord does not ask us to make them. He has provided a better way. We do not say that promises are not good, but it makes a vast difference who makes them. If a man owes a certain sum of money, it is a good thing for him to promise to pay it, provided he has any means wherewith to pay; but if he is bankrupt his promise to pay is not worth much.

But the man who promises to live a better life is a great deal worse off than the man who promises to pay a certain sum of money, when he is bankrupt. In this case the man may earn money, and so discharge his obligation. But in man there “dwelleth no good thing.” He has nothing wherewith to pay, and no power to perform the good that he has promised. So all human promises to lead a different life are worthless. They are worse than worthless, for they lead people to rest satisfied with their promises, whereas if those promises were not made they might the more readily see the necessity of taking the better thing that is offered.

It is impossible for a man to live a different life with the old life that he has been living. In order to live a different life, he must have a different life. “An evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil.” Luke 6:45. So it is with the person who promises to do good out of the evil that is within.

What promises, then, are of any value? The promises of God, and those only. The apostle Peter says of Jesus our Lord, that “His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be made partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” 2 Peter 1:3, 4. Here are promises that amount to something. They are the promises of God, confirmed by an oath pledging His existence to their fulfillment.

Notice that it is the power of the Lord Jesus Christ that gives us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Then it is certain that any one can add nothing to the sum. By His promises all these things become ours. When we have these promises, what is the need of making others of our own, when we have no power to make them good? Not only are our promises unnecessary, but they are harmful,

because they shut out the promises of God. They imply that His promises are not sufficient. Surely no one who has any just sense of the exceeding value of the promises of God, will think of supplementing them by worthless promises of his own.

Human promises can be seen in their true light only when we think of them as made to the Lord. Think of a someone making a promise to the Lord, and then coming to Him and asking for favors on the strength of the good promises that he has made! Now if a promise is good for anything, this is what he ought to be able to do. If someone makes a promise to pay another a sum of money, that is, if he makes a contract, something can be raised on that commitment if it is good for anything. But no one would dare to come to the Lord and plead any promise that the individual has made. We do not ask the Lord to bless us because we have made good promises, but because He has made promises. The Lord says, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake." Isa. 43:25.

The Christian life is indeed a life. And life means growth. "He shall grow as the lily" (Hos. 14:5), is the Lord's statement concerning the one who is His. Lilies do not grow by resolution, but by absorbing the elements which God gives for their growth. A resolution pertains to the future, but growth is not a thing of the future, but of the present. The Lord does not want us to tell Him what we are going to do in the future, about which we know nothing, but simply to take the growing power contained in His promises, and live by them day by day and hour by hour. The promises of God are the only hope of mankind. Why not depend on them, then, and not weaken their force by putting our own promises in their place?

Another beautiful new year has come. Brothers and sisters, family and friends are wishing you a "Happy New Year." But I want you just to stop a minute and think, while I ask you a question, "Are you happy fully happy?" Perhaps you will know better what I mean if I tell you about eight gentlemen who once were asked that same question.

They were old friends travelling together. Suddenly they asked one another, "Are you happy—fully happy?"

The banker was the first to reply. He said: "I have earned a large fortune. I have all the money that I possibly can need during my whole lifetime. I have a charming family. My wife and children do all that they possibly can to make home pleasant for me. Yet I am not happy. There is one thing which troubles me so much that it poisons

all my joy; that one thing is the thought that all these goods, these riches, this dear family, are not lasting and that soon very I shall lose them for ever.”

The colonel, who had been the commander of many soldiers said: “I have known the joys of a soldier, and the triumphs of war. How proud I have felt, when, at the head of my soldiers, I have overcome the enemy; or when, after the victory, I saw my name honorably mentioned by the commander-in-chief. But one day, seeing an officer lying on the battle-field dying, I tried to lift him up. ‘Thank you,’ said the dying one, ‘but it is too late! We must all die: think about it!’ And with his last breath, he said again, ‘We must all die!’ I never, never can forget it. These terrible words follow me day and night I have some moments of joy; but, alas! my friends, I am not fully happy.”

The next gentleman who answered the question was a very learned man who had done business for his country among other nations. He said: “Honors have been heaped upon me. Public gratitude has met me at every step. Yet I want something I know not what; my heart is empty. All my honors do not cure the secret longings of my heart.”

The poet said: “Even in my youth I had a wonderful gift for writing poetry. It was received with world-wide praise. Very many told me that my glory was immortal. But what is *such* an immortality? The flattery of men does not satisfy me. I desire a better immortality. And as I have no surety of ever receiving that, I am not fully happy.”

The man of the world said: “I have no such bitter complaints to make. It is true I feel rather weary sometimes, but what of that? I try still to be gay. I go to the theatre, to balls, to concerts, and to all sorts of amusements.” “But,” said one of his friends, “when old age, sickness, and poverty come upon you, what will become of your amusements?” “Then,” replied the worlding, “I suppose I shall have to give them up.” “But,” continued his friend, “when you think that you may sometimes lose your pleasures, are you fully happy?” “No,” replied the man of the world, in a low tone, “I am not truly happy.”

The old lawyer said: “I am now seventy years old. I have health, fortune, a good name, and a pleasant home. I used to fret and look anxiously forward to this time of leisure and rest. But now that I have it, the hours seem too long. I get tired of my newspapers and books, and do not know what to do with myself. I am not fully happy.”

Then the gentlemen who professed to be a Christian, but really was not, said, "I believe in God. Every day I read my Bible, and pray. On the Sabbath my place is never empty in the house of God. But my conscience is not easy; I do not get any peace and happiness out of it. Death, which is stealing on, fills me with fright. I always see in God a severe and angry Judge; and the thought of appearing before Him with my many sins, fills me with dread. No, I am not happy at all."

The eighth gentleman was a true Christian physician. He said: "My dear friends, I am not surprised to hear you say what you do. The Bible teaches, and we have proved it true, that neither money, glory, honors, knowledge, or anything else in this world, can make us fully happy. God has created us for Himself; and, so long as we do not give ourselves to Him, we are filled with uneasiness and longing. In my youth I did not know how to be a Christian, and although I did well in my business, I tasted no happiness. But, by the goodness of God, I have been shown a better way. The reading of the Bible showed me that I was a sinner, and that unless I received help, I certainly would be lost. Then I read about how Christ came and suffered and died to be my Saviour. Since then I have turned my eyes to Him, in sorrow for the sins that caused Him to suffer. I believed that He would forgive, because He said so. And He has washed my sins all away, and has given me peace and joy more than words can tell. I trust Jesus, take Him for my best Friend, and with the strength He gives me, try daily to live as He would if He were in my place." "You, then, are fully happy?" Said one of the company. "Yes, my friend, I trust in Him who gave His own Son that I might be happy in this world and in the world to come."

Now, are *you* fully happy? The Bible alone points out the way to true happiness. Do you read your Bible? Have you given yourself to Jesus? Are you every day trying to be like Him? Do you earnestly ask Him to help you? and do you believe that He does? If so, you then have the happiness which man cannot give, and man cannot take away. It begins on this earth, and is perfected on the new earth, where there is fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

Please learn this little verse, and repeat it every day during the new year: "*Happy* is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." Ps. 146:5.

"A Happy New Year!" These are the words that will be on all lips today. But is it indeed a *new* year to you? It may be; for God has said: "Behold, I make *all things new*." But that which He makes new

can never become old. So if this be to us really the beginning of a new year, the passing days will not wear out the blessing, but the experience of newness, of freshness, will be to us an ever present reality.

But how is it that all things are to be thus made and kept ever new? you ask. A most important question, and he who knows the answer, knows the whole secret of life, of health, of everlasting youth. Here is the answer: "If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*; old things are passed away, behold, *all things are become new.*" 2 Cor. 5:17.

Here is the secret, here is the mystery, summed up in one word, *Christ*,—"If any man be *in Christ*." For Christ is "the Beginning," so "if any man be in Christ," he is always "in the beginning," and life for him is forever new, forever beginning, forever fresh. Such an one can know no decay, no change, except "from strength to strength," "from glory to glory!"

Time passes, and all that belongs to time is carried away in its swiftly flowing stream.

"Time, like an ever rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away."

But "if any man be in Christ," he is no longer the son of time; for Christ "inhabits eternity," and His name is "I AM." Eternity passes not; it *is*. And he who is in Christ dwells in eternity. By the "power of an endless life" imparted to us, we become the children of the Eternal One, and "in Him *we are*." Then time that bears its sons away cannot touch us, cannot stamp upon us the ever-deepening traces that mark us for its own, until, with all "that which decayeth and waxeth old," we are "ready to vanish away."

"If any man be in Christ" the stream of eternity, which is "the power of an endless life," flows through him, and washes away all the rubbish left by the stream of time, until, instead of vanishing away, "mortality is swallowed up of life;" "death is swallowed up in victory!"

"There is a river, the streams whereof make
glad the city of God,
The holy place of the tabernacles of the Most
High.
God is in the midst of her; *she shall not be
moved.*"

Then let us this New Year be sure that we begin at the beginning, and "in the beginning,—God." Not this New Year's day

only, but every day let us remember that “all my springs are in Thee.” Let every undertaking be begun, continued and finished in Him, for all that cannot be so done must belong to those old things that are “passed away” “if any man be in Christ.”

And not only let everything be begun in Him, but let us be quite sure that He is the beginning of it,—that is, that the very suggestion of all that we undertake may come from Him alone; that it may be the impulse of His Holy Spirit guiding our minds, His power controlling our wills and using all our members to do His own sweet and holy will. Then we can go in no way but “whithersoever the Spirit is to go;” and this is always the right way, and “a *new* and *living* way.” For the Way of God is Christ, “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” He is the “path of the just, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day,” the Light of the world, whose beams celestial evermore make all things new.

This glorious Sun of Righteousness is shining upon us this New Year’s morning. May our hearts so fully turn to Him, that in His heavenly beams all old things may forever pass away, and all things become and continue forever new.

FROM every side sounds the wish which we from the heart utter for all our readers, “A Happy New Year!” From many a church spire, bells “ring out the old,” and “ring in the new;” but the hearts that have so merrily responded will in most cases as has so often happened in the past, soon forget the new, joyous impulses that the new year aroused, and the life will settle into its accustomed groove, no better for the awakening, but a little less responsive than before, because of good resolutions made and disregarded. Now just because our wish is sincere, we add to our greeting a few words that may, if heeded, enable each one to keep the newness and freshness all through the year.

God is the God of eternity. He is unchanged from everlasting to everlasting, and “in Him we live, and move, and have our being.” But eternity means constant newness, as is shown by the fact that God is unchangeable. We see “change and decay” in all around; but God remains absolute perfection. Therefore all who by faith abide in Him, dwelling with Him in eternity, must be continually renewed. Continual renewing means unchanged newness.

It is no fancy or hyperbole, to speak of dwelling with God in eternity; “for thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also

that is of a contrite and humble spirit.” Isa. 57:15. If He who inhabits eternity dwells with us, we must certainly dwell with Him in eternity.

“He that sat upon the throne said, Behold I make all things new.” This will be said before very long of the heavens and the earth; but even now God is performing this work for all who by faith consciously abide in Him. So we are enabled to say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” Ps. 103:2-5.

Happiness is always subjective, not objective. That is, it always depends upon the individual himself, and not on something external. If a person is to have a happy new year, he must himself be happy; and he will be happy if he remains ever new. This is not only possible, but it is God’s design for us all; for “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new; and all things are of God.” 2 Cor. 5:17, 18. The life of Christ is given us, to be “made manifest in our mortal flesh,” so that even “though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” 2 Cor. 4:11-16.

“It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning.” Lam. 3:22, 23. So since He crowns us with His loving-kindness and tender mercies, it is evident that if we receive them as from Him, and recognize the purpose for which He gives them, we shall be new every morning. Thus will each new day be in reality to us the beginning of a happy new year.

This is the true ringing out of the old, and the ringing in of the new. It is the putting off of “the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,” being “renewed in the spirit of your mind,” and putting on “the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” This “old man” that is to be put off, and the “old things” that pass away in Christ, are only comparatively old: they are old, not because of priority of existence, but because of decay; the “new man” and the things which of God become new to us, were “from the beginning.” The “new commandment,” that we love one another, is “the old commandment which ye heard from the beginning.” 1 John 2:7; 3:11. Only “that which was from the beginning,”—Christ, the Word of life,—is everlasting and always new;

for He is “the Beginning,” and He is “the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.”

Therefore, Abide in Him! “Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength;” and “they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.”