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2 Corinthians 5:11-21

New Year, New You

Happy new year everyone!

We are all another year older and perhaps if we're lucky even another year wiser. That is after all the goal of most of us - to take in our experiences every year and learn from them.

Have any of you set New Year's resolutions for the coming year? I find it amazing that something we are so universally bad at perseveres and comes around again every year.

According to one study that I found this week less than 8% of people who make a New Year's resolution actually keep it. Those are pretty low statistics for success. Yet, it's amazing that a "New Year's resolution" is a household name something that all of us recognize and still attempt every year.

But why is that the case? Why do we all keep making resolutions every year when common sense tells us, and apparently the statistics bear it out, that we're probably not going to stick with it.

Well, I've got an idea - and I think that the motivation we have to do "New Year's resolutions" is rooted in something true and good - but New Year's resolutions themselves are **the wrong way** of going about it. I'll explain as we go.

New Years feels like a fresh start. and since all of us share these three basic attitudes, it seems like a hopeful time of year to bring about some change in our life.

These three attitudes are:

1. knowledge of our imperfection
2. the desire to be better
3. the search for meaning and fulfillment.

These are not scientific categories, they are summary statements from both life and the structure of our scripture passage today.

(Go back and explain each a little more.)

No one needs to tell us that we aren't perfect. In fact, we live in a society that capitalizes on our knowledge of our imperfection. **Consumerism** is based on the fact that all of us feel imperfect. Modern Consumerism exists by lying to us and telling us that the purchase of this or that item

will lead us to completeness. Of course... we all know that feeling shortly after buying something – the emptiness comes back pretty quick.

The second point is like the first, except it has more to do with our moral selves than our completeness. We want to be better because we know that morally we are not *right*. We live in one of the most moralistic ages and while that might sound strange to you at first, I don't mean good morals, but certainly there has perhaps never been a society more ready to hate you and shame you for transgressing its morality. It is not a Christian morality most of the time, but it is certainly a strong morality concerning of what you should say, what you should think, and what you should do. Make the wrong comment about the wrong group of people or event and you'll find out what I mean.

When this project of reinventing morality began, well over a hundred years ago, there were promises and optimism about an improved society from certain atheistic thinkers. Yet society has not improved since then... in fact it's become more angry than ever. Frustrated with its own inability to make a new morality that makes sense. The dominant forces that are telling us what is right and wrong in this new age are not becoming happier as they gain more power - it seems that they are becoming even more aggravated. Hence the ridiculous things we've seen on both sides of our very polarized society.

Still, despite, the confusion and polarization there is a spark of something good in the fact that people still believe that “*somehow we must become better.*”

The last point is perhaps the definition of our age. People are looking for meaning and purpose and fulfillment in their lives. Some people have become convinced it's only through exploring their sexuality that they can find meaning and purpose. Some people think it is through work. Others through family. And many, hope its possible just by sprinkling an otherwise selfish life with a few charitable donations they can find fulfillment.

The story of the Bible completely confirms these three basic feelings:

- We aren't perfect, that's obvious and the Bible has always taught it.
- We aren't morally where we should be - even if others think that we are or tell us that we are - all of us know our inward thoughts and secret motivations and actions - and we are painfully aware that there is something wrong in each one of us.
- and all of us on some level know that our lives must mean something - but the big question is what? and why do so many things in my life feel so meaningless?

And from this, every New Year's resolution is born. We try to address one or two or all of these foundational questions and the problems.

Most of the time if you look up New Year's resolutions you'll find that solving these problems ends up revolving around the same things-

Diet, Diet, saving money, exercise, diet, positive thinking, and exercise.

I'm just giving you a list of the hits that come up first when you look up New Year's resolutions in Google. There's not actually a lot of variety.

And here's why I say **that New Year's resolutions are the wrong way of going about something that is actually a good desire in us** - New Year's resolutions are by and large self-centered, me-focused, vain goals.

And here's where the story of scripture differs immensely from our ideas of what a new year and a new you can look like.

The same problems need to be dealt with: we are imperfect, we are immoral, we are searching for meaning—and 2 Corinthians 5 actually deals with all three of these.

It all comes about in this letter to the church in Corinth not as Paul is giving a spiritual pep talk on a New Year's Day service but when Paul is talking about what makes a real, authentic apostle of Christ.

Paul is trying to convince the Corinthians (because there are people even among the Corinthian church that don't like Paul) – he's trying to convince them that he is a legitimate apostle and he's giving them the reasons why and he's also giving them the back story but what makes someone a legitimate missionary/apostle/Christian.

Lets focus first on 2 Cor 5:14-15.

The path to a real “New Year, New You” oddly begins with the acknowledgement that all of us are imperfect and that death must be the end of each one of us. Imperfection and death actually go hand in hand.

This is what bothers us about being imperfect:

***what is imperfect will inevitably keep degrading.*** Like a tiny spot of rust on your car will eventually take over the whole thing. Like a tiny crack in a rock will eventually split the whole thing in half given enough winters and summers.

But our perspective is not hopeless like someone who looks at life and sees that death comes for us all and then gives up. Instead, like Paul says in verse 15 we believe that the Christ event (His birth, life, death, resurrection) Reset the whole system of creation - it broke the chain of events that began with Adam and Eve. In Christ **all died** Paul says, so that **all** could have the opportunity of a new start. Our new life begins *with death*.

In Christ, we get a new start, no longer on that downward spiral of imperfection, but on a new foundation with no crack in the rock so to speak.

But this new start doesn't begin by a change in our **plans**, or a **resolution**, or an **effort**. It an only begin with a brand new start. Going back to the starting line of the race, so to speak.

Your life can start over and be built on Christ, the perfect rock, is where the “new you” can begin. He is our hope for completeness and perfection and truly solving the first of our three dilemmas.

On to the Second point – and for this we'll focus on verse 17 in our passage today.

Remember, the worldly approach to a new you is self centred. In this case, **we need to invent a new morality if we can't live up the old one** and *that's the stage we are in right now in our society*. But instead of bringing peace and prosperity it's bringing new forms of anxiety and strife as morality keeps changing in this culture and is subjective and no one really knows **what standard** they should be holding themselves to. It's making a culture of fear and confusion around us.

God tells us in the Bible that the problem is that **there is no standard**. **When people are doing what is right in their own eyes (Judges 17, 18, 19 21), it leads to chaos and strife**. While some people would say “this is a good thing! We want to abandon the old morality!” - the reality is that **no standard** is cruel to human beings – we need structure and established order and we wither without it. In situations like this, people seize power who are charismatic, power hungry and opportunistic.

The Bible actually teaches the moral standard has never changed. The standard from the Old Testament did not change when Christ came- **the moral standard from the Old Testament teaches was embodied by Christ – not abolished**. He fulfilled it and lived it perfectly - because human beings never could live up to it. To use Paul's words about the law, the law or the moral standard was good, but SIN ,seizing the opportunity through the law, brought death.

So the Bible actually teaches that trying to keep up with someone else's rules doesn't work. Even if they are God's own rules. How much worse is it then for us to try and keep up with man's rules.

The solution, scripture says, is not trying to be morally better and certainly not changing the standard to fit what we want it to be.

This is what it says: – “to be in Christ is to be a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17)

**What does it mean to be in Christ? 1 John 2:5-6 : This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.**

Let me put it this way for you, the standard never changes - God's word is consistent and true - but the way we live up to the standard is no longer based on our effort Like the OT- **it is based on God's grace and our loving devotion to Christ Jesus**. Imitating him in our lives.

Here's another way to put this point - you can't work your way up to being a new you - but in Christ God can make you a “new you” right now. But you'll start *looking new over time* as you grow in your **love and devotion for Jesus** the one who has made you new.

It's not about effort to follow the rules, it is about love for the one who loves you most of all. That's how you become a new you.

Paul says the old has passed away and the new has come.  
That means the old way of living by effort is gone...

That means the old you with all of its brokenness is forgiven and gone...

People are desperate to get rid of the old or the bad- people are desperate to get rid of the burdens or the weight (metaphorical or literal!)

Scripture tells us no amount of striving gets rid of the old - ultimately the “new you” comes through forgiveness and grace.

And not just the therapeutic forgiveness of forgiving yourself and positive thinking which doesn't actually change anything - but the kind of forgiveness that comes as a pardon from the King - changing your legal status - **and** like the paying of a debt - setting you free from the consequences have your old life.

That sounds like the kind of “new you” everyone wants - but scripture is clear that it only comes through Christ.

Now all of this “new you” sounds great - but we haven't talked about the thing that eats away at people even who appear to have a good life - they're torn up about purpose and meaning.

This dilemma taken down some bright stars of the past and many of you here know the bitter sting of suicide or depression with your family or friends when someone has not been able to see the purpose or meaning in their life.

**The amazing word that God has for us here in verses 18 and following is that our purpose actually flows out of our old brokenness.**

God is not in the business of erasing your life when he says He gives you a new start. It's not about cancelling out everything that's ever happened. God uses the word redeem to describe the process of being made new- it's taking you, you as you are, *you as you were* and bringing **that** “you” into new life.

In other words, **you** matter to God and he doesn't want to simply erase you and start over when you become Christian. He has been there your whole life, and He wants to use your story of brokenness and redemption to spread the good news of new life to other people who desperately need to hear it.

Your brokenness and your pain *from the past year* (or years) are not meaningless. Paul says in verse 18 that Christ reconciled us and gave us the **ministry of reconciliation**.

That means that your story of reconciliation becomes your message of hope, your gospel to share.

“I was in this mess, in that mess, and I did this, and I did that, but God saved me. God pulled me up out of that *depression* that *anger* that *addiction*. He set my feet on a solid rock. My life was splitting in half and breaking apart. I couldn't live up to anyone's moral code, Gods or societies. But God was gracious and kind and I met him when Jesus showed up in my life and saved me. He brought me back to where I was **always supposed to be**. He gave me a new start—to be the person I was always supposed to be.

Paul says in verse 20 “we are ambassadors for Christ”. Every part of our life matters - each little bit has meaning and purpose because it's all part of the work of being an ambassador for Christ.

Yes I've been made new but not just so I can indulge myself and fall back into the same patterns of broken living. **I've been made new so that I can have a new task and purpose in life.** To tell people there is freedom from anything and everything that binds you.

Are you a Christian today?

What's your story of freedom?

How has God set you free from purposelessness, greed and depression?

How has he forgiven you have your addictions to pornography or alcohol or drugs?

How has he made you a new person after your life has been torn apart by abuse or neglect?

Has he set you free from a cult, or hopeless atheism?

This is part of your ministry of reconciliation to share with someone who needs hope.

Or maybe one or more of those things still have a grip on you?

Perhaps you aren't following Jesus?

Are you ready for a New Year and a New You?

Christ is ready, too. He is ready to forgive. Ready to set your feet on the solid rock and begin fresh. He's ready to give you a purpose – a new ministry of reconciliation – showing others the Hope of a new start with God. **PRAY for response.**