Those Pesky Resolutions

(by Jamey Hinds)

Resolutions come once a year, right? Well, no. Resolutions can actually come at any time during the year, or even during the moment. It is simply a matter of whether or not we really want to change. And we all tend to do those things we really want to.

And that’s the real issue about making and keeping resolutions— we’re not serious about change. We talk the talk, of course, but when it comes to having to do the thing we know we need to do to be closer to God and His ways and thoughts, we vacillate (**Joshua 24:15**; **1 Kings 18:21**). And maybe we waver because we fear being embarrassed. I know the older I’ve gotten, the less likely I am to be embarrassed about things, but it still sometimes happens. Worse than that is the fact that some of us are more fearful about what others think about us than what God thinks about us. This means we’re not taking Him seriously.

***“For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man”*** (**Galatians 1:10-11**). We need to burn with commitment to the Lord—turn it on high and keep it there, never letting our guard down against our adversary, the devil (**1 Peter 5:8-9**; **Revelation 3:16**).

The first word of the gospel is ***“repent”*** (**Acts 2:38**). When Jesus went about preaching, the first word was ***“repent”*** (**Matthew 4:17**; **11:20**; **Mark 1:15**; **Luke 13:3, 5**; **Revelation 2:5, 21-22**; **3:3, 19**). When defining repentance, the apostle Paul commended the Corinthians — ***“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter”*** (**2 Corinthians 7:10-11**).

So what can we do to be effective in our service to God today? The resolutions are simple enough, it’s more a matter of whether we want to — **2 Corinthians 8:12**, ***“For if there is first a willing mind.”***

**1. Pray** — God does hear the prayers of sinners; but not the sinners who refuse to repent. Consider the example of Cornelius: he was a sinner when he prayed to God (**Acts 10:2**). God answered his prayers by sending him an angel to get Cornelius to send for the apostle Peter and have him preach the gospel. John reminds us, ***“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him”*** (**1 John 5:14-15**). This statement seems to indicate that we know God’s revealed will (through His word) and pray His word (e.g., the Psalms). Even the apostle Paul sought the prayers of the saints in Ephesus (**Ephesians 6:18-19**). We also learn from **James 5:16** that the ***“fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*** Of course, this statement precludes righteousness in the one fervently praying.

**2. Study** — We need to study God’s word for ourselves (**Proverbs 15:28**; **2 Timothy 2:15**). It’s not just having knowledge, it’s putting that knowledge into use. If we don’t use it, we’ll lose it (**Hebrews 5:12-14**). The caveat: ***“Knowledge puffs up”*** (**1 Corinthians 8:1**).

**3. Obey** — Again, knowing is one thing, doing is where it counts (**James 1:21-22**; **Luke 6:46-49**). As the apostle Paul put it, God has reconciled us to Himself through the sacrifice of His one and only Son ***“if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard”*** (**Colossians 1:23**). Nowhere in God’s word does He reveal that once we are saved that we will forever remain saved despite how we choose to live. As the apostle John was moved by the Holy Spirit to put it: ***“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil”*** (**1 John 3:8**).

Let’s resolve to be completely dedicated. R*ight now!*

Looking Unto Jesus

(by Kent Heaton)

Life can be hard when you want to live for Christ. Our faith is battered by the storms of life through sickness, sorrow, persecution and the challenges of sin. The early Hebrew Christians were faced with those same mountains to overcome and often would find themselves wanting to give up. In the epistle to the Hebrews, the writer offers hope and a promise of rest for those who would endure. The conclusion of this letter of exhortation is pleading with the people of God to ***“lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”*** (**Hebrews 12:1-2**).

When the encumbrance of sin is removed in life the vision becomes clearer to look to Jesus for hope. Looking unto Jesus will put a person’s life in the right direction. Jesus said, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life”*** (**John 14:6**) and our way must be His way; our truth His truth; and our life must come from Him. The Lord knows the right way and we must look to Jesus for the right answers. Through the word of God we gain enlightenment as the psalmist declared in **Psalm 119:105** – ***“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”***

Looking unto Jesus is looking at the “author” of our faith. As the author of our faith the Lord is where we originate our faith. Earlier the Hebrew writer said, ***“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain*** (author – ASV) ***of their salvation perfect through sufferings”*** (**Hebrews 2:10**). Paul wrote, ***“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”*** (**Romans 10:9-10**).

Not only do we look to Jesus as the author of our faith, but He is also the ***“finisher of our faith”*** (**Hebrews 12:2**). Our faith is perfected when we look to Jesus. Growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ instills in our lives the hope of promise (**Hebrews 11:13-16**) and the strength to endure through difficult times (**Hebrews 11:33-40**). We see His own example of faith when He ***“endured the cross”*** with ***“joy”*** (**Hebrews 12:2**). As a pattern of courage we can face the day with renewed faith and knowledge that the One who ***“has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”*** (**Hebrews 12:2**) will reign in our lives with the promise of giving mercy and grace in our time of need (**Hebrews 4:14-16**).

The greatest joy of looking unto Jesus is that we see the Father. Jesus said, ***“He who has seen Me has seen the Father”*** (**John 14:9**). When we look to Jesus we realize the blessings of mercy and grace to be God’s children. ***“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation”*** (**Colossians 1:12-15**). What do we see when we look unto Jesus? ***“Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”*** (**Hebrews 1:3**). Look to Jesus!