

A New Year!

By Royce Pendergrass

When we receive a gift, we decide what to do with it. It may be a special gift that you want to show off so you place it in a prominent place where it can be seen. It may be a very practical gift and not so pretty, but you know exactly what you will be using it for and can't wait to use it! It may be a token of a special relationship, and you vow to renew that relationship that you've let flounder. There are other types of gifts that we receive and things we can do with those gifts.

Yet, the beginning of a new year is a true gift from God, and we each decide what we will do with it! It's my hope that each one of you will have a renewed sense of dedication to and love for God in the New Year. My hope is that you'll not allow anything to come between you and Him – not only in this year but in all your years to come if you are granted more years. After all, He is the single most important Being in your life!

We read of different kinds of years in the Bible. Jacob spoke to Pharaoh of his years when he said, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been" (Genesis 47:9). That is a sad commentary on a life. He was not a happy person. There's a cure for that! Jacob had brought most of his sorrow upon himself as he tricked his brother Esau into giving up his birthright and their father's blessing.

However, he later made reconciliation with Esau, wrestled with an angel, declared he had seen God face to face and became a new, God-fearing man. His life went from evil to godly. God changed his life to use him in His service for the remainder of his life.

The great apostle Paul is another example of living his first years in a sinful manner. He "made havoc of the church, entering into every house and haling men and women, committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3). "Saul, yet breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and desired letters of him to Damascus to the synagogues that, if he found any of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1ff). Paul was torturing the early Christians in a driven way and causing hurt for many Christians.

There's an app for that! He met Jesus on the road to Damascus, and Jesus said, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and children of Israel: I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:15ff). The apostle Paul met Jesus and his life did a complete turn-around. He made three great missionary journeys teaching the world about Jesus, and he is the author of 13 letters in the New Testament that have been teaching all peoples of the world about Jesus ever since. He gave all his remaining years to God! His life changed from evil to God.

The Bible gives many other examples of people who changed their days and years from evil to good as they met Jesus, either in person or by being taught about Him from others. No matter how you meet Him, if you accept Him and devote your years to Him, you will be blessed. Like Paul, you will find "the peace of God which passes all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). That comfort becomes your faith and trust.

As this New Year begins, put all sin and evil days behind you and determine to live your future days and years for the Master. Make a change from darkness to light and have hope of living in eternity with God, Christ and the saints of all ages! Sometimes we sing this song, "In the land of fadeless day lies the city foursquare; it shall never pass away and there is no night there. God shall wipe away all tears, there's no death, no pain nor fears and they count not time by years for there is no night there."

If you haven't done so, please give your life to Christ, and then, determine to live for Him. If you are already a Christian, determine anew to give more of yourself to Him by devoting your time, effort and energy more completely to Him to receive the blessings promised to the faithful.



[**Editor's Note:** Jesus Himself summarized the divine plan of salvation when He said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Dear Reader, notice the equation presented by our Lord: belief + baptism = salvation. Have you applied our Lord's teaching to your life? Erring Christians are charged to repent and pray: repentance + prayer = forgiveness (Acts 8:22). ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

If I Could Just Start Over!

By Gary C. Hampton

Most people have wished for a "do-over," but once the mistake is made, we have to learn to live with it. Those reaching the point of knowing the difference between right and wrong will choose to do wrong at times (Romans 3:10, 23).

The good news is that Jesus made it possible for us to be delivered from eternal death (Romans 7:24-25). Anyone can be a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). His blood was shed for man's redemption (Ephesians 1:7). He shed it in His death on the cross (John 19:31-35).

Paul explained how one can reach Christ's death and the cleansing blood found there. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

Those baptized into Christ have been cleansed from their past sins (Acts 2:38), but they still need to be on guard against temptation (James 1:13-15). Denying that we have any problem with sin is really not an option. John said, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Thankfully, the Father has provided the solution. "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

Do not waste your time claiming to be perfect. Turn to Jesus, be washed in His blood and have all of your old sins removed (Acts 2:38). Stay on guard against sin, knowing that you can confess your sins in the assurance that God is faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9). He has lovingly provided the means for starting over.