

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

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“Write them upon the table of thine heart” [Prov. 3: 3(b)]

It is another January and another New Year. The popular pastime of most of us during this time each year is making New Year Resolutions. We examine our lives the year before and resolve to make some changes aimed at dropping what we consider undesirable, such as smoking, drinking, excess weight. Some others may wish to change jobs or careers, marry and settle down, or move to a new place.

What has always intrigued me about New Year Resolutions is that we hardly keep them! I know of somebody who resolves each year to stop smoking. A few weeks later, he is back at it, more ferociously too. When you ask him why, he will tell you that he has resolved to postpone the implementation of the resolution to the following year, and he has done that for ten years!

Another intriguing thing about New Year Resolutions is that making one at all implies that our “better days” are still ahead of us. Yet, in everyday conversations, I hear the same people talk of the “good old days,” a suggestion that the “better days” are behind! When did they miss the target?

It appears to me that we keep making New Year Resolutions each year because we don't know what we are doing, or we are doing it the wrong way. In today's lesson, we shall demonstrate God's approach to making New Year Resolutions.

1. But what is wrong with my present approach?

People make New Year Resolutions (NYRs, for short) because they have made a mental audit of their past and pinpointed areas where they think they have failed. A typical wish list may be based on some or all of the following circumstances:

- (a) I am in my late thirties and I have still not met the right man/woman to marry. Time is running out.
- (b) I am close to 40, on paid employment. I don't yet own my own home and I have no investments. I am toying with the idea of becoming self-employed.
- (c) I am completing my High School soon. What next?
- (d) I have been married for so many years and I have no single child to show for it. I can no longer stand my neighbour's jeers.
- (e) I'm widowed at 50. I have never had to work. How can I take care of 4 children all alone?

- (f) Smoking and drinking are eating up my internal organs. The doctor says that my days are numbered if I don't give up both.
- (g) I can't afford a new wardrobe. I must do something about my weight.
- (h) I've done all I know how but my congregation is not growing.

Those are genuine concerns that are shared by both believers and others alike. The good news is that there is nobody on earth that enjoys a trouble-free life. The likelihood is that we have made a wrong diagnosis and, therefore, the prescribed medicine (NYRs) could also be wrong.

In **Matt. 7: 24-27**, Jesus talks about two builders who faced the same set of hardships (rain, flood and wind) but came out with different results. They both faced **rain**, figurative of extreme pressure, the kind you can find in hell [**Ps. 11:6**]. Heavy rains produce **floods**, suggestive of great trouble [**Ps. 32:6**], or destruction [**Dan. 9:26**], or hostile world powers [**Ps. 93:3**], or an invading army [**Jer. 46: 7-8**], or persecution [**Rev. 12:15-16**]. The **wind** suggests destruction [**Job 1:19**], or drying up [**Gen. 8:1**], or turbulence [**Ps. 107:25**], or weight pressure [**Job 28:25**], or calamity [**Is. 32:2**]. But what happened in the end?

The foolish man built his house (figurative of our earthly body [**2 Cor. 5:1**]) on **sand**, an unstable and unreliable foundation. When we rely on the values and assumptions of the world system which is controlled by Satan and his forces [**Eph. 2:2-3; Eph. 6:12**], we are like the foolish man. Our foundation is slippery [**Ps. 73:18**] and resting on a temporal platform [**2 Cor. 4:18**].

The wise man, on the other hand, was able to withstand the storm because he built his house on a **rock**, symbolic of Jesus Christ [**1 Cor. 10:4**], the "author and finisher of our faith" [**Heb. 12:2**] and of His church [**Matt. 16:18**].

The Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe [**Prov. 18:10**]. When the winds of uncertainty stir up clouds of doubts and the ensuing floods of problems threaten to drown us, Jesus Christ is our anchor and platform. No matter how much we labour or how heavy-laden we may be, He will give us rest and lift our burden off our backs [**Matt. 11:28-30**]. Therefore, let's make our NYRs based on God's principles.

2 **God's approach to making New Year Resolutions**

Bible Text:

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth" [**3 Jn: 2**]

Let's apply this to ourselves in the context of our discussion: ***"It is my wish in the year 2001 to prosper and be in health even as my soul prospers."*** Isn't that powerful? This Holy Spirit-inspired formula has been with us for almost 2,000 years and yet we appear to have ignored it! So, let's make sure we understand it.

(a) The Prosperity of the Soul

The soul is the spiritual equivalent of our physical body. It is that immortal part of us that goes to heaven or hell when we die [**Gen. 35:18; Matt. 10:28**]. It has the attributes of the body, such as eyes, mouth, feeling, etc.

Remember the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus [**Lk 16:19-31**]. When Lazarus died, he “was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom” [v. 22], while the Rich Man was carried to hell. “In hell he lift up his eyes being in torments and **seeth** Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom” [v. 23]. Then, “he **cried** and **said**, Father Abraham,...” [v. 24]. Since their physical bodies had been buried (and turned to dust), it was certainly Lazarus’ soul that the angels carried to heaven. Similarly, it was the Rich Man’s soul in hell that saw, spoke and felt pain, just as the physical body. It is no wonder that what defiles a person comes from the inside [**Matt. 15:11**], and as a person thinks within, so is he on the outside [**Prov. 23:7**]. That is also why He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world [**1 Jn 4:4**].

With the soul, we can love God [**Lk 10:27**] and prosper [**3 Jn: 2**], or sin against Him [**Mic. 6:7**] and die [**Ezek. 18:4**]. A prosperous soul is more valuable than all the material wealth of the whole world [**Matt. 16:26**]. For example, peace of mind and love cannot be bought. Only God can provide them [**Is. 26:3; 2 Tim. 1:7**]. At the death of our physical bodies, the redeemed souls are guaranteed salvation in heaven [**Matt. 19:29**] and reign with Christ [**Rev. 20:4**].

Therefore, the soul that loves God, serves [**Deut. 10:12**] and obeys Him [**Deut. 30:2, 6,10; Eccl. 12:13**], and stores His word [**Deut. 11:18**] to guide the physical body’s daily walk [**Ps. 119:105**] is prosperous. That is why it is written: “*let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord*” [**Jer. 9:23-24**].

When a soul is not prosperous, it emits “evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” [**Matt. 15:19**]. These are the sources of most of the anxieties and fears that we have and around which we structure our New Year Resolutions. In deed, “a sound heart is the life of the flesh but envy the rottenness of the bones” [**Prov. 14:30**].

(b) Material Prosperity

An average person spends a life time striving for material success and, in the end, all is vanity because we came into the world naked and we shall leave naked [**Job 1:21**].

Millionaires are aspiring to become billionaires. The poor are playing lotteries to join the rich club overnight. Yes, the world has become more materially affluent, but its distribution has also become more skewed. Anxiety levels and suicide rates have gone up. New and incurable diseases are springing up. Those who trust in their riches shall fall but the righteous shall flourish like a branch [**Prov. 11:28**].

Another aspect of material prosperity is elitism built around advanced education. Intellectual property is the latest god in town. We tend to equate higher education with wisdom and rank expertise in a field of study over faith in the Almighty God. On that basis, we rely on computer-derived forecasts, the Horoscope and mediums to order our daily conduct. Painfully, innocent people are being misled and destroyed for lack of true knowledge [**Hos. 4:6**]. We forget that it was Adam who named **everything** created by God and God accepted every such name [**Gen. 2:19-20**]. Obviously, he had to be knowledgeable in **every field** of human endeavour to have achieved that feat. Yet, he fell to Satan’s tricks! Today, a Ph. D. holder in a tiny aspect of a broad field of study comes out openly to boast that there is no God! No wonder the Psalmist calls such people fools [**Ps. 14:1**] and “wisdom is too high for a fool” [**Prov. 24:7**]. Any New Year Resolutions based on foolishness can only be foolish [**Prov. 26:12**].

(c) Be in Health

A young man on trial for murdering both his parents pleads with the judge for leniency on the ground that he is an orphan! After destroying our bodies with wine and worldliness, we wind up with incurable diseases and other dangerous ailments and then come to the doctors or prayer warriors for healing. What an irony!

Only material prosperity that is built on soul prosperity can make us be in health and live long. Without that, we can easily deteriorate in both. In the box below, the longevity of our ancestors in the early days of human history has been tabulated. Let’s study the data.

1. Adam- 930 years [Gen. 5:5]	4. Sarah- 127 years[Gen. 23:1]
2. Methuselah-969 years[Gen. 5:26]	5. Abraham- 175 years[Gen. 25:7]
3. Noah- 950 years[[Gen. 9:29]	6. Isaac-180 years[Gen. 35:28]
	7. Jacob-147 years[Gen. 47:28]
	8. Joseph-110 years[Gen. 50:22]

When man’s wickedness multiplied, God decided to cut his longevity to an average of 120 years [**Gen. 6:3**]. You can see how longevity dropped from Methuselah’s 969 years to Joseph’s 110. Today, with all the sophisticated medical gadgets at our disposal, less than one per cent of humankind can make 100 years. So, “bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable

unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” [1 Tim. 4:8].

3. Conclusion

In making our New Year Resolutions, we now know that we should be guided by the following spiritual principles:

- ❑ Spiritual prosperity *precedes* material prosperity [Matt. 6; 33] and remains its life blood [3Jn: 2].
- ❑ You must maintain a *proper balance* between both [Matt. 26:41; 1 Tim. 6:6-10] for continuous *total health*.

Both principles are well illustrated in the following passages:

- ❑ **This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shall meditate therein day and night that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; *for then thou shall make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success* [Josh. 1:8].**
- ❑ **I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. *And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour, so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee in all thy days. And if thou will walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments,... then I will lengthen thy days* [1 Kgs 3:12-14].**

I wish you a happy New Year.

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