

The Challenge of a New Year

By Everett Hardin

In just a little over one week the year 2018 will have concluded, and a new year will have begun. With the beginning of a new year well-wishes for a **Happy New Year** are expressed to our friends and loved ones as well as casual acquaintances. Of course, all of us desire a happy and prosperous new year. Did it ever occur to you that this will be a Happy New Year for you only if you make it so? If one wants happiness and success he must plan for these things, then work the plans — carry out his good intentions and decisions.

Undoubtedly a period of trial and persecution is in the offering for God's people. But this should not cause us to faint or draw back. We must "*be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might,*" Eph. 6:10, with the realization that He has always made provision for His people and will not forsake us now. Let us not yearn for easier paths, smaller tasks, and lesser heights; but let us pray for strength and courage to meet every challenge to our faith. Instead of turning from disagreeable tasks as weaklings, let us confidently press on with the assurance, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,*" Phil. 4:13.

One of the gravest thoughts entertained is that every thought and deed is being recorded in an eternal record which none can rewrite. No combined efforts of men or devils can alter God's ledger to erase one error, nor can the passing of the ages obliterate one defeat. We should face each new year with the remembrance, "*So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God,*" Rom. 14:12. With eternal values before us, and with solemn knowledge that the Lord will judge all that we do, let us carefully serve the Lord. "*For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be bad,*" Eccl. 12:14.

Joshua called upon the people of God, "*choose you this day whom ye will serve,*" Josh. 24:15. Jesus taught the urgency of using present opportunities, saying, "*I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work,*" John 9:4. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, "*Exhort one another daily, while it is called today lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end,*" Heb. 3:12-13. Let us make it our business to be obedient, diligent and faithful in serving the Lord, now and for the remainder of our lives.

The following are some suggestions, which if followed, will make for a happy and successful year for all of us.

1. Be doers of God's will. Jesus is the "*author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him,*" Heb. 5:9. Faith "only" (i.e. mental assent only) will not save. Saving faith must be an obedient faith. Jesus will be "*revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power,*" 2 Thess. 1:7-9. If we are hearers only and not doers of God's will we sin. "*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and do it not to him it is sin,*" Jas. 4:17. True happiness comes only by doing the things we know are our duty, never from being hearers only. "*If ye know these*

things, blessed are ye if ye do them,” John 13:17.

2. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” Matt. 6:33. We are exhorted to acknowledge God as King in our hearts and lives. “*Seek*” means to search for, strive for, aim. His kingdom should be the chief aim of all; it should be first in time and importance. We must seek conformity to His standard of righteousness. What is the chief aim of man? To glorify God, and enjoy Him forever. “*Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee,*” Ps. 73:25. You are made for God; to love Him, to serve Him, to praise Him, and to live in fellowship; with Him.

3. Walk by faith. (*For we must walk by faith, not by sight*), 2 Cor. 5:7. Walking “*by faith*” means walking by the word of God, Rom. 10:17. If we go beyond the word of God we do not walk by faith. “*Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God,*” 2 John 9. This means to walk by trusting in God. Heb. 11:6 gives us a clear statement of what faith in God involves — belief in His existence, and in the fact that He will reward them who seek Him. Our faith must be reduced to a way of life. “*Even so faith, if it hath not works is dead being alone,*” Jas. 2:17. If Christianity is to be a force in this world instead of a form, it must not only impart truth and engender faith; it must motivate to action. “*Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him,*” Heb. 10:38.

4. Redeem the time. “*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise redeeming the time, because the days are evil,*” Eph. 5:15-16. One who redeems the time is one who is careful how he conducts himself and makes the most of every opportunity. Time can be highly valued, or lightly utilized or wasted in a futile search for happiness which only useful labor can assure. The law governing time is irrevocable, and time moves silently and swiftly onward. “*Whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow, For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away,*” Jas. 4:14. Life should be seen as an opportunity, a season characterized by one main duty, “*fear God and keep His commandments,*” Eccl. 12:13-14.

5. Spend more time studying the Scriptures. The “*blessed*” or happy person is one who delights “*in the law of the Lord, and in his law doeth he meditate day and night,*” Psa. 1:2. There is always a dire need for Bible study, Heb. 5:12-14. We must study if we desire God’s approval. “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,*” 2 Tim. 2:15. Freedom from sin depends on this. “*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,*” John 8:32. The word of God corrects falsehoods and gives understanding. “*Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way,*” Psa. 119:104. Only through this medium can we learn the way to walk with God, please Him and meet with His approval. “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in wisdom,*” Col. 3:16.

5. Be a soul winner for Jesus. Jesus died for all, Heb. 2:9. His great commission requires that the gospel be preached to “*every creature,*” Mark 16:15. Opportunity is all about us, yet our eyes are often closed and we are not looking for those to teach. Jesus exhorts, “*Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest,*” John 4:35. There is no more urgent need in the church today than for Christians who can and will talk to people about their soul’s need. No greater, more enduring work can be undertaken than winning souls for the Master. Both sower and reaper will rejoice at the harvest. “*And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto eternal life; that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together,*” John 4:36. Those who have turned many to righteousness will shine as the stars forever, Dan. 12:2.

7. Do not willfully forsake the assembling of the church. The first century Christians “*continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers,*” Acts 2:42. We must consider our fellow Christians to provoke “*unto love and good works; Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,*” Heb. 10:24-25. One of the purposes for which the Lord gave the church is that we might be edified as members of the body, Eph. 4:16. We need the strength for life’s problems and temptations, and we cannot successfully live the Christian life and render acceptable service to God without it. Everyone of us should be determined to attend every service it is possible to attend.

In the final analysis, true happiness and success can be enjoyed only by those who are saved, Acts 8:29-39; 16:30-34. If one would be truly happy he or she must place spiritual things above the material things. Surely all who read this sincerely desire to have a Happy New Year; strive to make this the best year of your life. Simply tackle your duty to God and to others and determine to succeed. Most of all, plan a deeply religious course — plan to live a life in obedience to the Lord. This is the greatest of all achievements. If we do this, then when 2019 has passed by, we will look back with no regrets but with a sense of satisfaction and contentment.

“A Bible in the hands is worth two on the shelf.”