

Looking back. Looking ahead. Making resolutions.

New Years' time is traditionally a time for making resolutions. I don't know that New Year's resolutions per se are necessarily biblical but there certainly are some examples in the Bible of those who made resolutions, sometimes with the wording "planned" or "determined." Read Psalm 17:3, Daniel 1:8 and Corinthians 2:2.

As we think about resolutions to make for the New Year, I would suggest the one set by Paul in Ephesians 5:15-17. Read those verses.

As an overview of those verses, Paul is reminding us of the truth that our time on earth is limited and we are responsible to God for how we use that time. As a way of encouraging us to use time as wisely as possible, Paul wrote that we should intentionally seek to make the most of every opportunity, being careful not to waste the time ahead of us. Paul noted that the best use of our time, in fact the only use of it that is legitimate and worthwhile, is to use it to accomplish God's will for us. As we look ahead to another year, each of us will have 8,760 hours to use properly or to waste. We will have 8,760 hours that we will have to give an account for to God. So how do we use them?

Having made that general but foundational observation read verse 15. Paul was saying, "*Pay attention to how you live.*" The word "**careful**" means to be skillful or on guard. It carries the idea of exactness, accuracy, even precision. Literally, be exact in making decisions of how to use your time so that you conduct your life to correspond to God's will for you. The easiest thing in life is to drift along with the crowd or simply through life with little or no thought about where we are going or where we will end up. Purposeful living is a challenge because it makes us think, it makes us take inventory of how we spend our time and resources. The careful life or purposeful living that Paul challenged us to seek a life that deliberately sets priorities so that the important is not lost in the midst of the good, or even more disastrously lost in the midst of that which has absolutely no place in our lives to begin with. It is too easy to float through life with no serious faults but with too few defining moments.

In Dr. Charles Hummel's challenging little booklet "*The Tyranny of the Urgent*," he noted that as Christians it is too easy to be so busy doing what is, in a very real sense urgent, that we fail to have time for what is eternally important. A biblical example of that is found in our first Scripture where Mary and Martha were entertaining Jesus in their home. Martha went to Jesus to complain that her sister Mary had left the work of caring for the physical needs of Jesus to sit and listen to Him teach. Jesus responded in part, "**Mary has chosen what is better.**" How critical it is for each of us to evaluate our daily activities to be sure we choose not just what is good but what is better.

Paul wrote that God has a plan for us and it is our responsibility to ensure that we don't get so caught up in the urgent or good that we miss the very best. Satan is described as a thief who comes in the night to steal. One of the things he wants to steal from us is precious time. If he cannot rob us of time by causing us to sin, he will seek to do it by robbing us of best, replacing it even with good because good is too often less than God's desired best.

Paul went on in Ephesians to challenge us to "**make the most of every opportunity,**" In the Greek there are three different words used to denote aspects of time. One word is "*hora*", from which we get the word "hour." The second word is "*chronos*" and from that we get our English word "chronological." A third word, and the one used here, is "*kairos*" and it was used to depict a fixed time or special time, those times when we might say opportunity knocks. "*Kairos*" is not an event you would normally stumble upon if you drift through life but those special times that come our way because God sends them, and we make the best of them. "*Kairos*" comes to those who determine to prioritize their lives, so they can do what is intentional and lasting. "*Kairos*" comes to those who do not accept life as usual but view each event, even the mundane ones, as an opportunity to glorify God, grow spiritually or share a testimony.

Next Paul wrote "**because the days are evil.**" All around us are influences that seek to draw us away from what is really important. TV tries to draw us into an addiction to a program that we will feel we just "can't miss it" regardless of what else may be important. Computers entice us to spend more time on Face Book or playing games, all of which may be good but in excess can squeeze out the best. In 2019 we will be challenged by Satan to be involved in a multitude of Sunday activities that any other time would be good but keep us from being together with God's people studying God's Word. We live in a difficult time to stay focused on the things of God. It is always a challenge to prioritize time with God and in His Word.

Paul went on, “**do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.**” What is His will for us? I would not even begin to suggest what His personal will for anyone of you might be. God has called and gifted each us in a different way. God's Word tells us that He has a plan for each of us that He worked out long before we were born. It is a personal plan that He designed for each of us to individually accomplish and with that plan He has given us all we need to accomplish it. God never gives us something to do without equipping us to accomplish it. We are not here by accident, designed to simply exist and die, perhaps moving the evolution scale a bit closer to perfection as some humanists suggest. Rather God created each of us uniquely and specifically to fulfill His plan in and through us.

While God’s plan for each of us is individual, the Bible sets forth challenges that we could easily put into the category of *"His will for each of us."* Read Romans 8:29. One of the things God desires for each of us is that we grow spiritually so we live more and more like Jesus lived. God desires that we are shaped into the same character that Jesus displayed when He walked among us. God's purpose for each of us is that we get to know Jesus so personally and intimately that we begin to think the way He thought and act the way He acted when He was here among us. Being conformed to His likeness is one of God's purposes for each of us, so if we make a resolution to use the next year as God would have us use it, we must include time for activities that will help us grow in that way.

Closely associated is a second goal that God has for all of us. Read I Thessalonians 4:3. To be sanctified means to live holy lives, avoiding sin. Sinning is never the will of God. Participating in activities that God has specifically told us to avoid is never part of His plan for us and therefore a waste of the some of the 8,760 hours in the coming year regardless of how we justify it or excuse it.

His will is also expressed in I Thessalonians 5:16-18. Read those verses. That is certainly very specific. When we determine how to use the year ahead and make the use of the 8,760 hours of it, we must include time to rejoice in all God provides. A major part of that is keeping our eyes open to the many things God does and provide for us and making a purposeful effort to give thanks to Him.

Jesus told us in Matthew 5:14-16 that He wants all of us to be His **lights in the world**. He wants us to be lights in this dark world. In 2019 we are His hands to give love, His voice to speak truth, His testimony to what the gospel is all about, His advertisement to the power of the gospel to make a difference in a life etc.

Finally, Jesus declared He came to give us **life abundant**. Read Jeremiah 29:11. God's will for each of us is that we have great joy in our lives. Too often when we think of doing the will of God that does not translate into that which includes full, productive, joyful lives. An important dimension to living as He would have us live is understanding that God's will for us is to live balanced lives whereby work does not consume us and neither does pleasure. They must co-exist in a proper balance to ensure we have the fullness of purpose for which He created us all.

Paul's challenge as we enter the New Year is to be very certain that we seek to use every hour doing that which is best, that which will count for eternity. Much of that "*best*" is all about life as we normally think of it, working and playing and laughing but doing it in a way that brings glory to God. The "*best*" comes when we transform the mundane into opportunities to become what He has called us to be or to do what He desires we do.