

New Year's Resolutions: 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to the book of 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1. Tomorrow marks the first day of a new year, which I am so thankful for.

! While on the one hand, we will only be another day into another journey around the sun, on the other hand, there is something seemingly significant about passing from one year into another. Doesn't it feel like we are turning a page in a book, closing the chapter that we call 2017 and opening the chapter that we call 2018?

Because of the grace of God to us in Jesus Christ, we always, each and every day, have the opportunity to start afresh.

But our minds are often drawn to make new commitments at the beginning of the year that we call resolutions. We are surrounded by people right now making resolutions and suggestions for resolutions that can be made.

[1 : 16] And so, this morning, my prayer for us is that we can look to God's Word together and consider how we can make resolutions that please Him.

Some have asked if resolutions are even biblical. Should we make promises to change? I would argue, yes, we most certainly should.

We have for us in the Scripture a pattern of God's people making promises that are pleasing to God. I want to give you just two examples, and then we will turn our attention to today's text.

The first is found in Daniel 1, verse 8, where Daniel resolves that he will not defile himself with the Babylonian king's food or wine.

The second example, Acts 19, verse 21, where Paul resolves to make his way to Jerusalem to fulfill his Nazarite vow, which was another resolve that he had made.

[2 : 28] So, this is just two examples that are many, many others. We ought to make commitments, right? Promises for change.

So, let us resolve together today to change, believing that change really is possible.

May we do so not just at the first of the year, but may we do so at the first of the year. Tomorrow is a new day, and we stand on the precipice of being able to be changed.

And may we do so in a way that pleases our God. So, our text for today is 2 Thessalonians 1, verses 11 and 12.

Before I read it, allow me to remind you, beloved, this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good.

[3 : 29] We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Begin reading at verse 11. To this end, we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The outline for this morning's text, if you're taking notes, is as follows. Number one, resolve to be holy.

Resolve to be holy. Number two, resolve dependently. Resolve dependently.

I have to always put a hard one for you to spell in there. Get those wheels turning early. Resolve dependently. And number three, resolve for the glory of Christ.

At the age of 19 and across some time, a young follower of Jesus Christ pinned 70 resolutions.

Promises aimed at God's glory and his, this young man's ultimate good.

[4 : 59] The first resolution reads, Resolve that I would do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory and my own good, profit and pleasure in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now or never so many myriads of ages.

Hence, this is the 18th century. Resolve to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolve to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great so ever.

This young man's name was Jonathan Edwards. He was an 18th century New England Puritan pastor. In the preamble to his resolutions, he wrote the following, and I think it's there for you on the screen.

Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these resolutions so far as they are agreeable to his will for Christ's sake.

So it's my intention this morning to weave Edwards' preamble through our text to set for us an example of application for how we are to make resolutions.

[6 : 27] So we're going to leave this up here for you. I hope that you have your copy of God's Word open in front of you, 2 Thessalonians 1, 11, and 12. And I'm going to do my best to weave the two together for you.

So first, resolve to be holy. If you make resolutions that are not aimed at your holiness, then you are setting your sights far too low.

If conformity to Jesus Christ is not the end goal of all that we do as Christians, then we are falling miserably short of that which God has called us to.

Holiness is our high calling in Christ Jesus. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1, verses 13-16, Therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that we brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

[7 : 48] Since it is written, and he cites Leviticus 11, 44, God speaks, You shall be holy, for I am holy. It is not true, as Clay said well last week, that God accepts us as we are.

Certainly, we come to faith in Christ as sinners, wretched, enemies of God, cut off from Him in every respect.

But having placed our faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ, we put on His righteousness. So God accepts us clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

He accepts us based on the righteousness of Christ. He accepts us because we stand before Him holy because of Christ.

And because of this, this status change for us, we have the Spirit of Christ who begins to work holiness in us.

[8 : 54] We don't stay as we were. We change in status, accepted, because we are holy, and we become more holy in ever-increasing fashion.

In our text, I want first to draw your attention to the prayer of Paul for the Thessalonian believers. He's writing this letter to a church.

And he says, to this end, we always pray for you. These believers are constantly in the prayers of Paul, as well as Savannah and Timothy, those who were accompanying him at this time.

We are always praying for you. What are they praying? That God would make you worthy of His calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power.

They are praying for holiness. These prayers are not aimless prayers. Paul is not primarily concerned about the circumstances of the Thessalonian believers, that they would have jobs or find houses or be in good health, but rather, he is firstly and primarily concerned about their holiness.

[10 : 24] That God would make them worthy of His calling. Some translations say here, count you worthy. Now, this is all very interesting language, is it not?

He's going to pray this thing. We pray for you. Two matters. That God would make you worthy or count you worthy of His calling. And the rest of verse 11, that you may fulfill every resolve for every good and every work of faith.

These are the two things that he is praying. So Paul hears saying that God would make them worthy of His calling or count them worthy of His calling is to say to them, we pray that you are in fact counted as worthy.

That you are in fact called by God in Christ. None of us are saved of our own doing.

This was the gracious call of Christ on our behalf. God reaches down to us and He counts us worthy. It's incredible reality, this effectual call of God on our behalf.

[11 : 45] And Paul is not so foolish to think that those who are part of the Thessalonian church who claim to be followers of Christ are necessarily followers of Christ. He is concerned as he prays for them that they are in fact followers of Jesus Christ, that God has counted them worthy.

And this counting, this accrediting to them worthiness is evidenced in the practice of faith, which is why Paul also prays that God on their behalf may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith.

Some translations translate the word here in ESV, translated resolve as desire, so it could be read, and may fulfill every desire for good and every work of faith.

So those who are in Christ desire to please God. The faith that they began by is the faith that they are being continually perfected by.

So Paul is concerned primarily in his praying for the Thessalonians' holiness. This was a consistent concern of Paul's for those who claimed to follow Jesus Christ.

[13 : 11] Because the fervent pursuit of holiness is a marker of those who are truly converted. Beloved, how is it that we have assurance, that we can have some confidence before God?

It's because we see God working in our lives, and we see God working in the lives of others. We look at somebody and we can say, with the kind of confidence a human can have, yes, Christ's. You belong to Him. I can see that you have a spirit, that you're hating the things of the world, and you're loving the things of God. That you're fleeing from sin, and you're loving holiness.

It is a great, damnable thing in many of our churches today that decisionism reigns. That it will be said of you, have a confidence because you made a decision.

There are many who are living atrocious lives, an absolute rejection of God, but because somewhere along the line, they made a decision, and then maybe a re-decision, right?

[14 : 15] They went to summer camp, and they threw a pine cone into the fire. That they think this is what has saved them, because it's what they're being taught. And the Scripture says nothing to this at all.

How do we know? How are we meant to know? It's because God is at work in us. He is fulfilling the desires that we have, which He puts in us for good and for work of faith.

The fervent pursuit of holiness is a marker of those who are truly converted. I want you to hold your place in 2 Thessalonians, and let me show you how concerned Paul was with the holiness of those who profess to follow Christ.

By looking at the prayers he mentions in 4 of his other epistles. I want you to see this point. I want to drive it so deep within you.

Those who belong to God love God and love the ways of God. There are people, even in our denomination, that call this lordship theology and want to call it a heresy.

[15 : 26] That we would say that those who are saved are converted, follow Christ. And this is how we know that we're converted. We need to have this set straight in our minds for our own assurance and for the assurance or not of others.

So let me show you some other places. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 13. These are all Paul's epistles, so you've got a little section you can stay in.

I'm going to have you flip a bunch here in a second. 2 Corinthians chapter 13, the first part of verse 7, Paul writes, but we pray to God that you may not do wrong.

Here's a standard, a holiness standard that he is hoping that people will, I'm not saying this is a perfect holiness, right? But we are growing in this. We pray to God that you may not do wrong.

And then down in verse 9 of chapter 13, the second part, your restoration is what we pray for.

Having done wrong, we pray that your restoration will, in fact, take place.

[16 : 46] Turn to the book of Philippians, chapter 1. Paul's concerned in his praying about the holiness of the Corinthian believers, and he's concerned about the holiness of the Philippian believers, verses 9 and 10.

He writes, and it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Turn to the book of Colossians. Paul is concerned about the holiness of the Colossian believers. chapter 1, beginning in verse 9 and following.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you. Here he is again, always praying for the Colossian believers, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all

spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy.

Again, concerned about the holiness of the Colossian believers. And finally, 1 Thessalonians, chapter 3. Verse 11 and following.

[18 : 53] This is a pinned prayer. So Paul is praying, now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

And then turn a few pages to chapter 5, verse 23 of 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you, perfect you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So Paul is very concerned about this as he's writing to the churches and as he's praying for the churches, right? That people would be found holy in Christ and be pursuing holiness, right? Being changed, being perfected in ever increasing degree. Never perfect this side in earthly terms, this side of glory, but always growing in holiness.

Now look at Jonathan Edwards preamble. This is the point that I was going to say. Look at the example that he sets for us in this way. Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these resolutions so far as they are agreeable to his will.

[20 : 32] Jonathan Edwards was concerned with these 70 results, right, which directed much of his life. In fact, he read these each and every week to himself to consider whether or not he was keeping up his end of these promises that he had made.

He only wanted to keep them so far as they were agreeable to the will of God. And so, we should resolve to be holy.

Now, I want you to be thinking about at this point some ways in which you need to commit your life to holiness. Some things that you may need to sit down, possibly pin, for the sake of pursuing holiness.

And to do that, I just want to read to you some of Edwards' resolves. These are not Scripture. To be clear, I'm not holding up Edwards' resolves at the same level as Scripture.

But I want you to see how it is he took Scripture's teaching and he pulled it out for his own life and made commitments to follow hard after Christ. If you'd like a copy of these, I made some of them available for you in the hallway after the service.

[21 : 49] These were, I think this is from Desiring God and they were organized in categories. So you could think in categories, character, habit, relationship, service to others.

Just listen to some of these commitments that Edwards made and consider commitments you might make yourself this morning. Resolved. And I love this one.

To live with all my might while I do live. Resolved never to lose one moment of time but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.

Resolved never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life. We will all stop using social media.

Resolved to inquire every night before I go to bed whether I have acted in the best way I possibly could with respect to eating and drinking.

[23 : 01] Interestingly, Edwards was effectively a vegetarian. Resolved. I'm not making any implications about the way you should eat at all there.

At all. Resolved never to suffer the least motions of anger to irrational beings. Resolved never to speak evil of any except I have some particular good call for it.

Resolved when I feel pain to think of the pains of martyrdom and of hell. Resolved if I take delight in it as a gratification of pride or vanity or any such account immediately to throw it by.

Resolved to maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking. Resolved to examine carefully and constantly what that one thing in me is which causes me in the least to doubt of the love of God and to direct all my forces against it.

Resolved to study the scriptures so steadily constantly and frequently as that I may find and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

[24 : 22] Resolved never to count that a prayer nor to let that pass as a prayer nor that as a petition of a prayer which is so made that I cannot hope that God will answer it nor that as a confession which I cannot hope God will accept basically resolved not to pray bad prayers resolved to strive to my utmost every week to be brought higher in religion he means devotion to God and to a higher exercise of grace than I was the week before resolved whenever my feelings begin to appear in the least out of order when I am conscious of the least uneasiness within or the least irregularity without I will then subject myself to the strictest examination resolved never to give over nor at the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions however unsuccessful

I may be and so Jonathan Edwards as a young man the age of 19 sat and pinned down these resolutions and Clay and I were speaking this morning about this and he pointed out not expecting that they would be published and read by so many he did this in the quiet devotion of his time with the Lord he committed himself to holiness he pursued it with every part of his being and the very last sentence of the preamble which I didn't think served us well to live on the screen with us the last part of it says to read it every week right so he went back through these things across the expanse of his life and considered his successes and his failing in his resolves to be holy secondly resolve dependently you are powerless to change yourself in any meaningful way but God is all powerful and God desires to change you into the image of his son this is why Paul so readily prays for the church right he knows who to ask for this thing to take place he asks God the one who can meaningfully change people he knows that only God brings about meaningful change so you see verse 11 our text in 2 Thessalonians to this end we always pray for you that our God may make you and that God may fulfill these desires for good and works of faith in the end of verse 12 according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ we are utterly entirely dependent upon God for holiness Paul wrote in Philippians chapter 2 verse 12 and 13 therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed so now not only as in my presence but much more in my absence work out your own salvation with fear and trembling so there's a working to be done on behalf of the

Christian and we're to be working in a way that gives evidence to the fact that we are in Christ because we should rightly understand what it means for us if we're not I believe that's why Paul says with fear and trembling that I would find myself to be approved because of the way I live! Because if I'm not my death and doom separation from God so how is it that we do this Paul tells us in verse 13 Philippians 2 4 it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure the meaningful change takes effort on our part and it takes the grace of God if we resolve to be holy we can have confidence that God will work in our working toward that great end in fact we can know that our resolve to want to work was a gift of God itself to begin with meaningful change will take effort on our part but ultimately it takes the grace of God and so we should resolve dependently [29 : 15] Edwards in his preamble wrote this being sensible being of sound mind is what Edwards is saying this is the greatest mind America has ever produced says being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help I do humbly!

and treat him by his grace to enable me to keep these resolutions so we ought to resolve to be holy and we ought to resolve to be holy dependently and third we should resolve for the glory of Christ why did Paul want to see the Thessalonian believers grow in holiness why was he so concerned about this in the life of those who claim to be followers of Christ beginning of verse 12 I didn't get it out in the announcements 12 tells us so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you so that who Jesus is would be magnified on the earth right that we would be ever increasing in holiness as this evidencing of God's graciousness toward us in

Christ resolutions aimed at making you a better you miss the mark when your end goal is your glory and not the glory of Christ in your intention you have made yourself a God and bowed before a paltry and failing throne Samuel Rutherford this is on your bulletin Puritan pastor said build your nest upon no tree here for you see God has sold the forest to death and this includes our physical bodies it's really hard for me not to think about the amount of gym memberships that are going to be sold next week when I think about resolutions!

It's not a valuable thing but I would argue that you ought to be fit in order to serve God that you would be healthy so that you can serve the Lord with all your might there's only so much definition necessary to pull that off many people will spend countless hours looking just so so and our bodies our flesh will turn to dust that is part of this forest that's been sold to death build your nest upon no tree here for you see God has sold the forest to death our resolutions should be aimed at the glory

of Christ Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 31 so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do do all to the glory of

God and in Colossians chapter 3 verse 17 Paul writes and whatever you do in word or deed do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus that is to say in consistency with who he is in order to make him known giving thanks to God the father through him it is the high calling and the greatest joy of the Christian to know God and to make him known to others Peter wrote in 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 9 and following you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his own possession he's talking about the church here right those of us professed to know Christ who were found in him were a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his possession what does he intend to do with this people who were set apart for him that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light once you were not a people but now you are

[33 : 46] God's people once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy! and Peter goes on to write we often stop there when we look at this text but he goes on to say beloved I urge you as sojourners and exiles we belong to a different kingdom not the kingdom of this world this forest sold to death but another world where sojourners and exiles Peter says to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul keep your conduct among the gentiles honorable Peter's writing to a Jewish population so he's talking about those outside the faith right keep your conduct among the gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation it is the high calling and the greatest joy the Christian to know God and to make him known look again at

Edwards preamble being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these resolutions so far as they are agreeable to his will for Christ's sake to the glory of Christ so resolve to be holy resolve dependently and resolve for the glory of Christ in conclusion I would like to ask you seven questions they'll be short for the sake of application and I'm going to ask you a question I'm going to follow up with a bunch of questions so don't count them please I'll number them for you how about that seven questions number one what about you most needs to change what about you most needs to change let me for a moment not assume that everyone in this room is found in

Christ this morning if you are not in Christ if you've not placed believing faith in him in this brief time we've had together if you have heard me speaking about what it means to be a Christian and you have thought that does not characterize me at all I love my sin I love the things of this world I don't love the things of God then the thing that needs to change about you is that status you need to see that your destination is hell and death forever and you need to place your faith in Christ you need to believe in his person and his work that he died on your behalf and that you can have his righteousness you can be found holy in him today accepted by God that's what needs to change for you but if you are in Christ this morning you can with some measure of confidence say yes I am in Christ I am accepted by

God in him this morning what particulars need to change about you what sins seem to ensnare you haven't been set free from them you keep going back to like you're a slave to it what habits do you neglect God has given us so many wonderful graces that we ought to take up do you read your Bible enough do you pray enough are you regularly sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ do you work hard do you rest well what about you most needs to change secondly why would you like to change change if you're thinking of a thing that needs to be changed about you what most needs to change why would you like to change is your desire for change for

God's glory and therefore your good or is it ultimately about you third question how are you going to change change if you're identifying something in your life that necessarily needs change you need to be pursuing holiness in a particular way that's well motivated how are you going to change what is the plan for change in your working how are you going to carry out this thing how will you flee from these sins that ensnare you how will you develop a habit that you have been neglecting make a plan beloved so many of us want to change and we just sit around hoping it will happen get active write it down share it with someone else and get busy working the change in your life

[39 : 07] God is a change for holiness is motivated for his glory will empower! you to do so number four what is most likely to prevent your change what is most likely to prevent your change what circumstances need to change in order for you to change some of you find yourself entertaining sins because you stay up way too late some of you don't work hard enough during the day and so

you have way too much energy at the end of the day to do things you ought not do some of you aren't picking up the things that you ought to be doing for the very same reasons so does your schedule need to change you need to change some of your friendships you hanging out with people that are leading you unbelieving friends but who are the influencers in your life have you failed to change so many times in the past that you were afraid to even try past failure that's going to keep you from trusting in the grace of

God to change question five what truth do you need to believe in order to change let me offer you just two Romans 8 1 Paul says there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus many of you don't think change is possible because you tried or you carry such a burden of guilt because of your failure that you don't think you can go to God in order to be changed but if you are in Christ there is no condemnation in your failing flee to the cross plead the blood of Jesus on your behalf and then get to work changing there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus a second Paul writes Philippians 1 6 and I am sure of this sometimes we're not so sure I'm so glad Paul is I am sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ it is a great motivator for me to know that someday I'll be completely set free from this body of death that I will no longer have any inclination towards sin and I will be finally perfect forever that is a motivation for me to pursue perfection now right and that it's God who works it in us and I'm sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ question six are you committed to change this thing that you have or may identify in the coming weeks is going to take work on your part are you ready are you ready to take it up by the grace of

God and work at changing and finally how can the church help you change we gather together regularly to remind each other of the goodness of God to us in Christ to remind each other that there is a holy standard and that change is possible we can be moving toward it to remind each other that there is no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ to continue to press at one another and we do that in these more formal settings but there is so much informal interaction that should be happening in the life of our church how can we help do you need to be accountable to somebody to stop doing something or to start doing something let me suggest to you that you not find a person who's dealing with the exact same thing because soon you won't talk about it anymore because you feel bad about how messed up you both are in this particular matter find someone who's found some victory in this who's picked up the promises of God and has seen God working in this particular strength or weakness in their life and have them help you run the race well maybe there's some ways that God's given you victory in another thing and you 6am who faithfully reads their Bible and open your Bible with them I'll do that for you stop thinking that you are powerless to change God is at work in the life of his church and in your life to bring about these things right pursue holiness pursue holiness pursue holiness resolve to be holy resolve dependently and resolve to the glory of

[44 : 55] Christ let's pray together