

Resolutions for the New Year

(Presented by Herb Trout to the adult Bible Class on Sunday Morning December 30, 2001)

All of us who have been reading three chapters per day have now read the New Testament and 13 chapters in Proverbs. Let's finish reading Proverbs this week, then next week we will start back at Matthew and begin reading three chapters per day.

The lesson that I was going to present today, I will teach next Sunday. I feel like the most important thing we can do this morning, which is the last Lord's day of this year, is for us to encourage one another to set some resolutions for this new year which begins next Tuesday.

In my opinion the number one goal that we can set is to set some time aside to read from the Bible every day. We have been trying to do this for the last thirteen weeks. I know of three who have read the entire New Testament during that period of time. The lesson this morning is to keep reading the Bible every day. Just because we have read the New Testament through is no reason for us to say, "I have read it through once, now I can quit reading and do something else with my time." That is exactly what Satan wants us to think. Here are some things for us to think about:

1. If we do not read and study on a regular basis, our souls will spiritually starve to death.
2. If we do not study, it will make no difference in the resolutions we make in our Christian walk—we will not keep them.
3. If we do not study daily, it will seriously affect our prayer life.
4. Our efforts in reaching out to the lost will cease.
5. We will become bored in Bible class and in the worship services.
6. The assembly will become no more to us than a social gathering.
7. Our souls will be filled with doubts and fears concerning judgment day.

8. If we do not study our Bible, we will become clock-watchers waiting for the closing prayer so we can go and do things that we enjoy.

9. If we do not study, our thoughts will be on material things most of the time.

10. If we refuse to study on a regular basis, we will find ourselves going for days and not even thinking about the love that God manifested to each one of us.

Now listen closely:

1. Sin will keep us away from this book, but this book will keep us from a life of sin.

2. It is not enough to go through this Bible. This Bible must go through us.

3. It is not enough to mark our Bibles; the Bible must make a mark in our lives. We must always have a longing to be nourished by the word of God, because if we don't, we cannot stand approved before Him, II Timothy 2:15.

We make time to take care of this physical body. It doesn't matter how busy we get, when it comes to feeding our bodies, nothing stands in our way. We are totally dedicated to doing this. We do all of this for our outward man, but it is perishing day by day. Our bodies are destined for the grave and corruption. It will not cross the river of death. Our soul is the only thing we possess that will cross that river of death.

The question that should be upon each of our minds right now is: Where have I placed my priorities? Is my top priority taking care of my physical body (which will decay), or is my top priority taking care of my spiritual inner man which will live forever either in Heaven or Hell?

Isn't it a great delight, when we are really hungry, to sit down to a table of delicious food? Now it must be a greater delight to sit down and feed our souls on the word of God.

I would like to assure us today that if we will study our Bibles every day, desiring to be nourished by it, it will nourish our souls. Then we will take time to feed upon it and we will enjoy feeding our souls and look forward to it.

I believe that every one of us here this morning counts ourselves as having at least average intelligence. How do we rate when it comes to where we put our priorities in this life? Jesus said in Matthew 5:6 *6Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.* In II Corinthians 8:7, Paul tells us to abound in our knowledge of God. If we are desiring right now to increase our faith, Romans 10:17 says that the only way this is possible is by studying or hearing the word of God.

Hebrews 3:10 says *10Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.* It grieves God when we do not know what He says in His word. Question: What do we think that it does to God's heart when we do not even desire to study His word?

In I Peter 2:2 it says *2As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.* We could spend this entire class period just reading verses that tell us we must study God's word, but surely these verses are enough to show us that our number one resolution for the year of 2002 is to read from our Bibles every day. Hosea says in Hosea 4:6 *6aMy people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.* Doesn't this make studying a matter of life or death? I believe that is exactly what Hosea, a man of God, is saying. I know that this is stirring up our comfort zone. But that is what God's word is supposed to do.

Studying the Bible every day is a great resolution to live by, and it is certainly a great resolution to die by, because I John 5:13 says *13These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.* Let's read Proverbs 2:3-7:

3Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; 4If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; 5Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. 6For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh

knowledge and understanding. ⁷He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.

Now turn to Proverbs 3:1-13.

¹My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: ²For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. ³Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: ⁴So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. ⁵Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. ⁶In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. ⁷Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. ⁸It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. ⁹Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: ¹⁰So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine. ¹¹My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: ¹²For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. ¹³Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

I believe that the number two resolution we should make is that we are going to work harder at reaching the lost in 2002 than we did in 2001. To do this, we will have to change our lifestyle. For example, a few years ago some of our leaders in the church of Christ conducted a survey to find out how many members there were in each church and how many baptisms they had in the past so many years.

Here is the sad result: 95% of our members never reached a single soul outside their own family. Now my question to each one of us this morning is do we think that this is a serious problem we have in the church today and that we need to try to improve our efforts to reach the lost in our community?

I think most of us know that 40 years ago the church of Christ was the fastest growing church in the United States. Now it is becoming smaller every year in the United States. Question: What has happened to cause us to lose our love for the souls of others? The answer is very simple. We as members and teachers and preachers and elders do not work at it like we used to do.

For example, I already had my lesson prepared for today but something just kept pressing on my spirit the need to bring a lesson on making new commitments at the beginning of this new year. The easiest thing for me to have done was to present the lesson I had already prepared, but that would not satisfy my conscience. So Friday I started writing this lesson. This is not an easy lesson to prepare because I know when we talk about the need to change our lifestyle we have a tendency to call that meddling in other people's lives. In Galatians 1:10 it says *10For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.* Question: Do we seek to please man or God? If we seek to please man, we cannot be a servant of God. I want all of you to love me, but I want God to love me, too. So I would like to ask a question here: Do you want me as your teacher to encourage us in things that will cause us to draw closer in our relationship with God or would you rather for me not to disturb our comfort zone that we have come to enjoy? I know that God is listening to every word I say, and I am also very much aware that God expects me as a teacher of His word to teach all of His word.

Now we are going to use the words of the Holy Spirit to motivate us to be more concerned about lost souls. The power to move us to a closer relationship with God is found in the words of God. The most powerful verses that I know of in the scriptures to help motivate us to change our lifestyle toward the lost are found in Revelation 2:1-7:

1Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; 2I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: 3And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. 4Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 5Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. 6But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

In these few verses we read about a hard-working church, but God was not pleased with this church and told them if they didn't change their lifestyle He would come and remove their candlestick. Now let's notice all the good things this church was doing:

1. They worked with all diligence.
2. They did not tolerate evil.
3. They tried the false teachers and found them to be liars.
4. They had a very strict discipline program.
5. They had patience.
6. They had borne up under demanding circumstances.
7. They had labored and not fainted.

Question: What was wrong with this hard-working church? Answer: They had left their first love. In verse 5 it tells what their first love was. It was their first works that they had left. Now if we only knew what their first works were, we would know if we are guilty of doing the same things that they were doing.

Let's go to the book of Acts where the church had its beginning and see if we can find out what the 'first works' of the early church means. Let's read these verses:

Acts 2:1-41 - The gospel was preached and 3,000 souls were saved.

Acts 4:4 - Five thousand more were saved.

Acts 4:32 - A multitude believed.

Acts 8:1-4 - Persecution against the church became so severe that the Christians were scattered abroad. Notice what the Christians did: They went everywhere preaching the word.

Acts 8:12-13 - The word was preached and many believed and were baptized.

Acts 9:42 - Many believed in the Lord.

Acts 10:45-48 - The gospel was preached and many believed and were baptized.

Acts 11:21 - A great number believed and turned to the Lord.

Acts 13:48 - Many believed.

Acts 14:1 - A great multitude believed.

Acts 17:4 - The word was preached and people believed.

Acts 17:12 - Many people believed.

Acts 18:8 - The gospel was preached and many heard, believed and were baptized.

Acts 19:18 - The word was preached and many believed.

I believe that the Holy Spirit makes it very clear what the first works of the early Christians were – they went everywhere sharing the love of God with others. Let’s not forget a very important fact: They did this during a time when it could have easily cost them their life. We today in the United States are at liberty to teach the word of God to anyone without fear of severe persecution.

Let’s never forget what Jesus said to this church at Ephesus: “You have left your first love and if you do not repent and start doing your first works, I will come and remove your candlestick.” Doesn’t this sound like something we should give serious thought to?

Now let’s notice how this harmonizes with what Jesus taught in Matthew 28:19-20. ¹⁹*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

Let's pay close attention to what Jesus said to His apostles. He said, "I command you to go teach all nations and baptize the believers and then you command them to go do exactly what I commanded you to do." These two verses teach the same thing we have just read in Revelation 2:1-7. Jesus is the teacher in both places. These two examples make it very clear what the first works of a Christian are. We are to teach the lost and then we are to baptize the believers and then we are to teach them to go and do likewise.

When we read the first seven verses of Revelation chapter 2, we do not find anywhere about any soul-saving effort going on. It seems that all of their attention was being given to the church. Jesus has spoken on this matter. He has made it so plain that any opened-minded person can understand it. We must share His love.

Jesus has left us with just two choices. We can repent and change our lifestyle, or we can go on living our old lifestyle. Question: When someone becomes a Christian, what is one of the first things we notice that they do? They bring someone with them to worship. They will set up Bible studies with their friends. How do they do it? They have not lost their first love. They give up their old lifestyle of thinking about themselves and they start thinking about the souls of others. They are enjoying their salvation and want to share it with others.

To help motivate us to get involved this new year in soul saving, we must remember how miserable we were before we became a Christian when we thought about standing before God on judgment day with all the sins we had committed. Compare that with the feeling we had when we were baptized and had all of our sins washed away by the blood of Jesus. We could then get up every morning with a smile on our face and a spring in our step knowing that if Jesus came back today we would be ready to meet Him.

The only joy that is as great as the joy we felt when we obeyed the gospel is when we lead someone else to Christ. In Luke 15:7 Jesus says *and I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance*. Jesus says that angels rejoice in Heaven over every sinner who repents and is baptized. Let's never forget what Jesus is saying here. This should really have an impact on our minds about just how valuable each soul is to God. This verse is saying that when we baptize someone into Christ, it

causes a great celebration in Heaven. This is an occasion when man and Heaven come together for a time of rejoicing.

I want each one of you to know that you are very special to me for coming to this class every Lord's day. This tells me that you love the Lord and that you want to be encouraged to live a closer life with God. That is my purpose in teaching this class. We all know that a soul-saving effort is not an easy task.

1. It was not easy for Jesus. It cost Him His life.
2. It was not easy for God. It cost Him His Son.
3. It was not easy for the apostles. It cost many apostles their life.
4. It was not easy for the early Christians. It cost many of them their lives.

We have these examples in the Bible to help show us just how much importance God places on each soul. What an advantage we have over them. We should fully use our religious freedom today to save the lost.

I believe that there are some verses in Romans 13:11-14 that are relevant for us today. *11And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.* *12The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.* *13Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.* *14But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.* Paul wrote this to the church in Rome, but it also applies to the church everywhere.

James says in James 2:17 *17Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.* In verse 24 it says *24Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.* This is exactly what Jesus was teaching in Revelation 2:1-7. Now let's remember that James and Jesus are talking to Christians. Paul tells us in II Corinthians 13:5 *5aExamine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.* Question: Who are we working for, ourselves or God? I would like to ask each one of us: Do we

ever examine ourselves? The Holy Spirit tells us to. Question: Why must we do this? Because if we will, we will know immediately if we are serving ourselves or God, so it is very important for us to do this. If we will, it will probably save our souls.

Now in examining ourselves, let's ask ourselves: Did we make any special effort to bring someone to services with us in 2001? Whatever our answer is, let's try to improve on that in 2002. Have we tried to set up a Bible study with anyone? If we haven't, let's try to improve on that. There are plenty of men in this congregation who would be glad to hold a Bible study with others if we don't feel comfortable in doing it ourselves.

When I was writing this lesson down, I was examining myself and letting some excuses run through my mind, and then I had an awakening thought. It went like this: What if the elders decided that the church would give \$100 a piece to us for everyone that we brought to service next Sunday? Then I thought about all the things that I could do to get others to come to services with me. It showed me where my priorities were. That is the whole purpose of self-examination. It enables us to see our own hearts.

