

A NEW YEAR, A NEW BEGINNING! Bobby Witherington

A little over one year ago, the calendar year 2023 was launched from the bosom of time. It came forth, both swift and fresh, and zipped along speedily. Suddenly one quarter had passed. Then another! And another! And another! And now the year 2023 has faded into the grave of history, and by the grace of God a new year has begun. Indeed, how *“great is the Lord,”* Psa. 145:3, *“how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out,”* Rom. 11:33!

We cannot recall the past, but like that peerless apostle to the Gentiles, we can reach *“forth unto those things which are before,”* Phil. 3:13. But what things *“are before?”* From a this-world perspective, no one knows for sure, for we do not know the future. (Cf. Prov. 27:1; James 4:13-15.) But we do know **Who** holds the future! Our lives, until now, have been lived in the past, but our destiny lies in the future. As last night’s sleep and yesterday’s food will not suffice for tonight and tomorrow, neither will our past studies, sacrifices, and obedience suffice for the future. A new year has begun. And in a very real sense, a new year makes for a **new beginning**.

As the old year concludes and a new year begins, it is common for sincere people to make what they call their “new year’s resolutions.” Psychologically speaking, it seems that more people are in the frame of mind at this time of the year to reflect upon the past, to consider the present, and to plan for the future. However, regardless of the time of the year, when one discovers something amiss in his life, he should make immediate correction and not wait for the beginning of a new year. After all, regardless of what day it is in one’s life, there is no guarantee of tomorrow. This is why the wise man said, *“Boast not thyself of tomorrow: for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth,”* Prov. 27:1.

Properly understood, as it relates to character, it is impossible to make a “new beginning” without first **ending** (or concluding) that which stands in the way of a “new beginning.” This principle applies even in the process of becoming a Christian, *“a new Creature”* in Christ, 2 Cor. 5:17. As one rises from the waters of baptism, he rises to *“walk in newness of life,”* Rom. 6:3-4, which is certainly a “new beginning.” However, scriptural baptism must be preceded by genuine repentance, Acts 2:38, which is brought about by *“godly sorrow”* for past sins, 2 Cor. 7:10, and which is evidenced by a change in one’s behavior. A true Christian is one who sets his *“affection on things above, not on things on the earth;”* he puts **“off”** such things as *“anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication,”* etc., Col. 3:8-9, and he puts **“on”** such things as *“tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering,”* and *“love, which is the bond of perfection,”* Col. 3:12,14.

“A NEW BEGINNING” DEMANDS THAT WE:

- ◆ **Stop being jealous of others!** Jealousy is a *“work of the flesh,”* Gal. 5:19-21, whereas those who belong to Christ must crucify *“the flesh with its passions and desires,”* Gal. 5:24.
- ◆ **Stop holding, and nursing, grudges!** Christians are people who have been forgiven by God for their offenses committed against Him, Acts 2:38; 22:16. Yes, there may be those who have wronged you in certain ways, but their offenses against you are probably minor when compared with your offenses against **God!** Scripture says, *“Be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you,”* Eph. 4:32.
- ◆ **Stop feeling sorry for yourself!** Yes, there are doubtlessly many others who enjoy better health, make larger salaries, live in finer houses, etc., than you, but so what? If you are a faithful Christian, you have been *“blessed...with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,”* Eph. 1:3, and if you remain faithful you have awaiting you *“an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away reserved in heaven for you,”* 1 Peter 1:4!
- ◆ **Stop dressing, talking, and acting like people of the world!** A virtuous woman adorns herself in *“modest apparel,”* 1 Tim. 2:9. Scripture enjoins us to *“let your speech be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one,”* Col. 4:6. True Christians *“shine as lights in the world,”* Phil. 2:15.

- ◆ **Stop worrying!** Jesus taught that God “feeds” the birds of the air; He “clothes the grass of the field;” He “knows” the things we have “need” of, and He has promised to provide the necessities of life to those who “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” Matt. 6:26, 30, 32-34.

A “NEW BEGINNING” DEMANDS THAT WE:

- ◆ **Engage in honest self-examination.** Paul exhorted the saints at Corinth, saying, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith...,” 2 Cor. 13:5. It is possible for one to “think himself to be something, when he is nothing,” and thereby be self-deceived, Gal. 6:3. It is also possible for one to “think of himself more highly than he ought to think,” Rom. 12:3.
- ◆ **Set new goals.** It is common for people in the world to “plan for their retirement,” and then (hopefully) to “enjoy their retirement” once it officially begins. However, in the service of the Lord, there is no retirement this side of death itself. Christians are exhorted to “be faithful until death,” Rev. 2:10. Notwithstanding his previous accomplishments in the Lord’s vineyard, the apostle Paul said: “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus,” and he noted that fellow Christians should follow his “example,” Phil. 3:13-14, 17. Some of my fondest memories are of faithful Christians, who were “old” in years, but young at heart, who, notwithstanding the pain in their bodies, wore a smile on their faces, and always had an encouraging word for anyone striving to serve the Lord.
- ◆ **Devour the word of the Lord!** We should have the attitude of the Psalmist who exclaimed, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth,” Psalm 119:103. Figuratively speaking, the prophet Jeremiah said, “your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart,” Jer. 15:16. The “blessed,” or happy man of Psalm 1:2 is the one whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.” Jesus said, “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” John 8:32. But no one really knows the truth unless he spends time **studying** the word of God.
- ◆ **Be a soul winner for Jesus!** Jesus said, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples,” John 15:8. Paul longed to journey to Rome that he “might have some fruit among” them, just as he had had “among other Gentiles,” Rom. 1:13. “Fruit,” as used in these verses, denotes souls won to the Lord. Paul exhorted Timothy, saying, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also,” 2 Tim. 2:2. To Peter and Andrew Jesus said, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men,” Matt. 4:19. We, too, should be “fishers of men.” As it relates to soul winning, let us truly make a “new beginning” in the year 2024, and do all we can to bring souls to Jesus!
- ◆ **Trust in the Lord!** Solomon said, “trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding,” Prov. 3:5. Isaiah said that “those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint,” Isa. 41:30-31. What a beautiful metaphor — mounting “up with wings like eagles!” The eagle, for good reason, is our national bird. Eagles dwell in high places, Jer. 49:16. They are known for their far sightedness, Job 39:27-29, and for their swiftness, Jer. 48:49. They see the storm before it comes and rise up above the clouds. Indeed, those “who wait on the Lord...shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary!” In this year of “a new beginning,” let us place our trust in the Lord. He will not forsake us, Heb. 13:5.

Conclusion: A new year has begun. In all matters pertaining to our relationship with the Lord, and our fruitfulness in His vineyard, let each one of us truly make “a new beginning!”