

New Beginnings

Goldstone Church – 03-Jan-16 10:30am

Philippians 3:10-16

Introduction

At this time of the year, most people have one thing in common: they make New Year Resolutions. But why do we make New Year resolutions? The only answer that makes any sense, is that there are areas in our lives, that we are either unhappy with, or where we want to do better.

According to several surveys in UK and USA, the number one New Year resolution is to lose weight and get fitter. Clearly, people are not happy in key areas of their lives.

But what about making New Year resolutions for your *spiritual* life? Is there something in our Christian life that may have slipped a little – and needs to be addressed?

In Philippians 3:10-16, the Apostle Paul is open about what he wants in his spiritual life. Even though Paul can be considered as a mature Christian and a deep theological thinker, he declares (v.10) that he wants to know Christ more and more.

So, what are the key factors that will help us towards new and fresh beginnings in our spiritual lives?

1. A DISSATISFACTION (PHIL 3:12A)

“Not that I have already obtained this”

This is an amazing statement. The Apostle Paul is generally considered as one of the most important figures in the New Testament. He founded several churches in Asia Minor and in Europe, and took advantage of his status as a Jew and as a Roman citizen to preach to Jewish and Gentile audiences. Paul also wrote to the churches regularly, and his letters outlined key and foundational Christian truths – Christian knowledge and understanding that we still study today.

And yet, the Apostle Paul still says, *“Not that I have already obtained this”*. Paul admits that he still hasn't grasped and followed through all the implications of what it means to know Christ.

Clarification: the word 'dissatisfaction' may seem negative and off-putting to some people. But Paul was satisfied with Jesus, he was dissatisfied with His own Christian life.

For many people, they are happy that they have a job, but there is a dissatisfaction with their performance in the workplace. Similarly, in our Christian lives, we are thrilled with what Jesus has done for us, but, at the same time, we can be less than satisfied with how we live our lives as Christ's ambassadors and representatives. We could do better.

We need to follow the Apostle Paul's example; of being satisfied with Jesus, but dissatisfied with our Christian lives.

One of the key factors that will help us towards new beginnings in our spiritual lives, is to have an honest dissatisfaction with where we are now – so that we can move on in our walk with Jesus Christ.

2. A DEVOTION

(PHIL 3:13B)

“But one thing I do: [forgetting what is behind...]”

Dictionary definition: DEVOTION = “strong attachment to, or affection for a cause, or a person, marked by dedicated loyalty”.

In Philippians 3:13, Apostle Paul declares that he has one over-arching objective: he was totally devoted to Jesus Christ, and single-minded about this. Paul wasn't making Jesus just a priority, but making Jesus the undisputed priority. This was a deep and sincere devotion.

Clarification: in our 21st century English society, talk of an undisputed and dedicated loyalty, may sound as extremist, radical, fanatical, perhaps even revolutionary.

But Christianity is all about relationship. It's not about ritual, it's not about religion.

Christianity is about being in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The devotion that Apostle Paul is talking about is not fanatical extremism. Instead, Paul is focusing on his personal, worship-relationship with Jesus Christ; placing this relationship as the undisputed priority.

We need to follow the Apostle Paul's example, of being loyal and dedicated worshippers, focused on deepening our relationship with Jesus Christ.

One of the key factors that will help us towards new beginnings in our spiritual lives, is to devote ourselves afresh to enriching and growing our personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

3. A DIRECTION

(PHIL 3:13C)

[But one thing I do:] *“forgetting what is behind”*

People in church face different spiritual directions:

Backward: always referring to what God has done in past; referring to past blessings.

Left/Right: always checking what others around them are doing; making sure they fit in and do the same.

Downward: focusing on themselves; it's all about 'me and my problems' - a selfish viewpoint.

Upward: people who are “so heavenly minded, no earthly use”; unaware of the realities of life.

Everywhere: always looking out for what was next; worried they'll miss something.

Q. what direction are you facing?

Apostle Paul in this passage is encouraging us to look **forward**. The word "forget" does not mean a failure to remember, but not to be controlled by past sins or past failures.

We need to follow the Apostle Paul's example of looking forward, looking expectantly towards the next stage in our Christian lives.

One of the key factors that will help us towards new beginnings in our spiritual lives, is to realise that we are not controlled with past events. We must look ahead and actively step forward in our walk with Jesus Christ.

4. A DETERMINATION

(PHIL 3:14A)

“I press on”

“Determination” may be uncomfortable to some people; could suggest that salvation is dependent on how much effort we put in. Easy to think that, because of all the “stuff” that we have done for God, He will have to reward us and save us.

But that’s not how it works. Our relationship with Jesus Christ is not dependent on what we do. Our relationship with Jesus Christ happens because of what He has done for us on the cross at Calvary. We are only here because we have received the gift of God’s grace and love in our lives. Anything we do, is in *response* to the grace and love that He gave to us in the first place.

When Apostle Paul talks about “pressing on” and being “determined”, he is talking about *choices*. To determine, i.e. to choose God’s way for our lives.

Every day we are presented with different options that we need to decide upon; practical choices, like what to eat, but also spiritual choices:

- A prayer time, or waste time
- Read your Bible, or check your email
- Watch a dodgy movie on TV, or go to bed
- Church Midweek group, or go down the pub

We face choices in our spiritual lives.

We need to follow the Apostle Paul’s example, of choosing the path for our lives that deepens our relationship with Jesus Christ – not the opposite.

One of the key factors that will help us towards new beginnings in our spiritual lives, is to choose the way that is consistent with our status as being ambassadors and representatives of Jesus Christ.

5. A DISCIPLINE

(PHIL 3:16)

“let us live up to what we have already attained.”

“Discipline” is another word that may be uncomfortable with some people; possible undertones of being disciplined, of being told off and of school detentions!

The Apostle Paul is not saying that God is some “Big bad guy on the sky” with a big stick, who will tell us off and punish us the moment we step out of line. Instead, Paul is saying that we are to fulfil our calling as being God’s people. There must be discipline in our Christian lives; not in a negative or legalistic way, but in a God-honouring fashion.

I believe we need to follow the Apostle Paul’s example, of living lives that reflect our status as disciples of Jesus Christ.

One of the key factors that will help us towards new beginnings in our spiritual lives, is to celebrate our disciplined relationship with Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

These are the Key Factors for a New and fresh beginning in our spiritual lives.
To have a:

- **A Dissatisfaction** – for what has gone before.
- **A Devotion** – to our relationship with Jesus Christ.
- **A Direction** – to look forward to the next step in our walk with Jesus Christ.
- **A Determination** – to choose ways that are consistent with being followers of Jesus Christ.
- **A Discipline** – to live lives that outwardly show that we are disciples of Jesus Christ.

Motto Verse for 2016 is Proverbs 3:5-6:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.*

God is calling us this morning to a fresh start – a New Beginning in our spiritual lives with Him. He is calling each one of us to trust in Him afresh. To recommit ourselves to Him.

How will you respond?

AMEN