

Resting Fully in God's Amazing Grace in the Coming New Year

There is hardly anyone in America who does not feel the need to make New Year's resolutions at this time of year. So many people make promises to themselves of things that we need to change to, hopefully, make things better for our lives in the coming year. Oddly enough, the resolution lists that Americans make stay pretty much the same from year to year. We resolve to: lose weight, stop smoking, stop drinking to excess, get out of debt, or at least get a better handle on our finances, eat healthier, be kinder, be a better parent, spouse, employee, and even learn something new.

Christians may add other things to our lists including, read the Bible more, take more opportunities to witness to our non-believing neighbors, serve at the local food pantry, more faithfulness in our church attendance. The list could go on and on. Each of those things are all good things in and of themselves. If we are not reading our Bible, we need to. If we are not getting to know our neighbors we should be looking for opportunities to do that and if we are not weekly attending Lord's Day worship services we ought to seriously consider why we are not. But, it is important that we are seeking to do all of these things from the right foundation and with the proper, biblical motivation. Christians everywhere need to stop trying to live as if we need to add anything to what Jesus Christ has already done that we think will make us more acceptable to God. We are already accepted by God through the perfect, finished work of Jesus Christ. Christians have been given God's grace as a free gift to us. We should never believe that our works—no matter how important they may be—can ever add to what Jesus Christ has already done.

Christian author Jerry Bridges in his important book entitled, 'Transforming Grace' has written, "Living by grace instead of by works means you are free from the performance treadmill. It means God has already given you an 'A' when you deserved an 'F.' He has already given you a full day's pay even though you may have worked only one hour. It means you do not have to perform certain spiritual disciplines to earn God's approval. Jesus Christ has already done that for you. You are loved and accepted by God through the merit of Jesus, and you are blessed by God through the merit of Jesus. Nothing you ever do will cause Him to love you any more or less. He loves you strictly by His grace given to you through Jesus."

Understanding the grace given to Christians in Jesus Christ is so very important in every way, even in our prayer lives. Many Christians have fallen prey to the lie that God is more likely to answer our prayers if we are kinder, more patient or if we have had our daily 'quiet time.' Again, it is important that we are patient and kind; it is important that we spend daily time with God in the scriptures and in prayer. But we want to do those things because God already loves us not so that he will love us more. We are already loved in Jesus Christ. God will never love his children any more or less than he does at this moment.

The old hymn writer, Augustus Toplady reflecting on God's grace wrote these well-known words, "Not the labors of my hands can fulfill Thy law's demands; could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone; Thou must save and Thou alone." We can add nothing to the finished work of our Savior. In the coming New Year, my prayer is that all those who are reading this article will seek, by God's grace, to get off the 'performance treadmill' and rest fully in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois