

## **20/20 Foresight**

### *Vision and Purpose in Your Personal Life*

January 2009

As another year passes into the background of our lives, most Americans focus on their future for the next 365 days. We want to know what's coming down the pike and we want to be ready for it. That's part of our culture, but it also keeps us from enjoying the moments that make up our lives. Oftentimes, we are too busy to see the beauty and simplicity in every moment. We might even ignore it in favor of more things to put on our overloaded calendars.

One of the most common phrases in our culture states that hindsight is 20/20. In other words, looking back makes it easy to see mistakes, victories, and all of those events in our lives that we would not have seen in the moment. This looking back causes heartache at the losses, pleasure in the gains, and gives us a general feeling about ourselves and our lives. So I want to point each of us to the future with a different emphasis in this New Year.

As you look back this year at what has transpired in your life, you see certain things about yourself and your life. But what is the ratio of good things in your life to bad things? We look at the negatives because we are wired to remember the negative rather than to realize the positive. Then we search our lives, our personalities, character, even our soul, for those things that cause these negative attributes we so desire to change in ourselves. Finally, every New Year as we look back, we turn our attention forward and

want to change those attributes so that we feel better about ourselves.

We have built up this tradition of the New Year's Resolution. We think of all our negative features and character traits and commit ourselves to changing those things about us that we least like. What an interesting tradition! A tradition that by its very nature causes us to immediately take stock of all of the negative things about us, relegating the positive features to the curb, and then to count on ourselves to change who we are and what we do. This tradition is fraught with perils!

Have you ever considered the positive characteristics about yourself and the positive deeds you have done in the past year? This tradition blinds us to the good things about ourselves that we would be afraid to admit anyway (or if you're a megalomaniac, you would gloat about them). When people tell me I did a good job, I hang my head and mutter, "Thank you." But that is also the wrong way to go about the good in each believer's life.

The Bible does not speak to this whole process at all if you are a believer in Christ. I think we have some serious thinking and acting to do based on a proper understanding of what it means to be a new creature. In our American context, we have centered our evangelism and discipleship on a decision to follow Christ, all the while ignoring the

supernatural work that God does in us (not that we do ourselves!) to re-create us into the likeness of His Son Jesus. We all fall short and sin, even after we have been made new creatures because we continue to live in a fallen world. But we are no longer who we used to be! Don't ever diminish God's promise or active work in your life to make you new!

But that's exactly what traditions like a New Year's Resolution do to us as believers. First, they remind us of our old selves, those bygone creatures we used to be. You are not like that anymore! Paul especially is very clear on this in Romans 6 when he tells us that we have died to our old selves. Do not misunderstand. When we do slip up and sin, we need to ask God's forgiveness and continue our part in becoming like Christ, which is obeying God's commands and seeing ourselves the way He sees us. But we as human beings are prone to get caught up in the now instead of the not yet. We are prone to wander in the streets of what's temporal (where we live now) instead of what is eternal (who we really are).

On top of this unbiblical turning to the negative character traits within us, we move then to commit ourselves to do better. We commit to sinning less, eating less, shopping less, and all the other "lesses" that we can think are the cause for the character traits and deeds that we find most appalling. But the Bible doesn't seem too positive about our ability to change ourselves. Throughout Scripture, a careful reader will find that the Bible clearly demonstrates our lack of ability to control and change ourselves without outside help.

Jacob wrestled with an angel before he saw the changes needed in his life. In fact, the new name he was given signified the

new nature God had given him through that battle. The nation of Israel would be idolatrous and pagan without God's intervention through the Law and the prophets. Isaiah saw Jesus, the Lord of Glory in Isaiah 6 and was changed for good so that he could declare God's words as a pure prophet in impure times. And the crowning understanding of this principle of our inability to change ourselves came in a manger over 2,000 years ago, lived a sinless life, and offered Himself on the cross to take away our sin and to provide a gateway between God and humanity through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. Jesus shows us ultimately that we cannot change ourselves. Even in the acts of salvation and sanctification, God does the work and we respond to His Spirit and His commands.

When we make New Year's resolutions, we violate these two central themes of the Christian life. I'm not saying that we are still learning how to be what God has already made us, that new creature based now on Christ's nature, but I am suggesting that first seeing only the negative in oneself and then relying on oneself to change will not be effective because the Bible says we are new creatures and that God does the work in us. Growth is done by God, acknowledged by us as we obey and trust in Him. Only God can change the human heart! He knows best what needs changed in us. He's got a plan for your future, to make you more into what you will be. There's no need to turn to your own resources.

This New Year is different in a strange way for me. For one of the first times in my life, I intend to spend the New Year focusing first on the benefits and goodness that I have integrated into my life from this previous year. But then I refuse to create some silly resolution that may last a week if

I'm really devoted. I'll listen to God's view of myself instead of my own. I'll deal with the sins and character traits God brings into my heart. My purpose and vision for this next year seeks to acknowledge God's working in my life and to obey Him more, to

surrender more of myself to Him, and to give the King of time control of my life and character. I want the One with ultimate 20/20 future vision to rule my life. I seek the Lord and the Lord takes care of the rest.