

Introduction:

It's 2020. A flip of the calendar hasn't seemed quite so significant since Y2K. It's a new year and for many of us that represents a fresh start and new beginnings. We've resolved to make changes. We're going to get up earlier, eat less, exercise more, save more money, give more money away, get a new job, find a spouse, dump a boyfriend or girlfriend, smile more, be kinder, worry less, pray more, study more, watch less tv, and on the list goes. We plan to have better habits, better jobs, better marriages, better relationships. We are resolved to be better people. In fact, now that it is a new year, many of us plan to be a whole new "me." Everywhere online, you can find businesses and advertises promising to help you become a whole new you in the new year. I guess we've jumped on the bandwagon. However, almost every pitch you hear for becoming a new you in the new year is flawed. Most of them simply won't work. Because most of them make one of three mistakes. These mistakes were actually demonstrated nearly 2000 years ago in the letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus in Asia Minor. I'd like us to discover these three mistakes so you can be a new you in the new year if that is what you really need to be. By the time we are done, we are going to see that it takes two to be a new you. I'd like us to learn who those two are.

Discussion:

I. Mistake #1: I'm just going to try harder.

- A. Many people look at all the things they want to change in their life and think the one key is if they just tried harder. Being different, being better, being new is completely in their power. If they just purchased the right self-help book, got the right planning software, figured out the right mechanisms, pumped up their will-power, increased their self-discipline, and tried really, really hard (harder than they have in all the previous years when they made all the same resolutions). However, Paul explains this approach is folly in **Ephesians 2:1-10**.
- B. Look, I get it. There are some things we can probably change all on our own. If your New Year's resolution is to quit biting your nails or drink more water or get up earlier, I imagine you can do that without much trouble. There are a dozen tricks you can apply and before you know it, you'll have a new habit. However, if what you want is to be a truly new you, if what you want is to excise what is bad (and by that I mean sinful) and add in what is good (and by that I mean what is truly holy and righteous), then you will never accomplish that on your own. Like it or not, there simply isn't an app for that. You won't make it.
- C. Here's how Paul explains it. Every one of us developed a habit of sin. We walked in trespasses and sins, following the path of all the sinners before us, just walking the way the world walks. We were, by nature children of wrath just like everyone else. That is, sin had become second nature to us. It was the path we followed without even thinking about it. Oh sure, when we had gotten just the right amount of sleep, the sun was shining, we had eaten, our team had won the championship, our relationships were going smoothly, and there were no problems at work, we could stay on our guard and avoid the big sins. However, the moment a wrench got thrown in the works, we missed a meal, had trouble sleeping, we felt all alone, or someone had made us angry, the guard went down and the next thing we knew that commitment we had made to abandon sin was lost. We wondered what happened. Without thinking, we went back to what was second nature, we went back to the habits we had developed. We sinned. And then we sinned some more. And then we got in a downward spiral of shame and sin. We lived in the passions of our flesh, we carried out the desires of our flesh and our minds.
- D. But God did not leave us alone. When we were dead in our trespasses and sins, He sent Jesus. He didn't just send Jesus to set an example. He didn't just send Jesus to instruct us in a better way. He didn't just send Jesus to show us it could be done. He sent Jesus to die on a cross, to be the sacrifice by which we could be set free from our sins. He sent Jesus to save us from ourselves. We see the reference to this in **Ephesians 2:13, 16**. This sacrifice paid for the gift of salvation. We often hear about free gifts. But there is no such thing as a free gift. Every gift has to be paid for by someone. It is a gift because the person who benefits from it didn't have to pay for it. The gift of salvation was paid for by Jesus on the cross. That salvation is a gift to us. We benefit from it, but we didn't have to pay for it, we didn't have to work for it. When we have it, we cannot even boast

about how great we were. We can only boast in having a loving God who has paid for the gift and mercifully given us the gift.

- E. Then here is the key for our lesson today. Notice the very last verse of that section from Paul, **Ephesians 2:10**. Rather than us working, we are God's workmanship. When we are the saved, God is working on us. He recreates us. But notice why. He recreates us to walk in good works. God has prepared a set of good works for us to walk in and through Jesus Christ He remakes us, He recreates us to walk in them. In other words, I cannot try hard enough on my own to make a new me. You cannot try hard enough to make a new you. Without the recreative, remaking power of God through Jesus Christ every attempt you make will be nothing more than a tweak on the old you. You may be a little more disciplined you, a wealthier you, a thinner you, a more muscular you, even a little bit nicer you, but without the recreative work, you will still be nothing more than a slightly better version of the dead in sin you.
- F. Don't make the "I'm just going to try harder" mistake. It will never work.

II. Mistake #2: I'm just going to let God handle it.

- A. Interestingly, many people actually have heard of the first mistake. When they do hear about it, they hop on a pendulum and swing to the other side, making the exact opposite mistake. If it doesn't matter how hard I try, then I won't try at all. It doesn't matter what I do, God will have to take over and just do it all for me. I'm just going to keep on doing what I'm doing until God decides to make some changes in me. Paul demonstrates the folly of this approach in **Ephesians 4:17-24**.
- B. Here's how Paul explains it. He had said in **Ephesians 2:1-3** that before we were in Christ, we were walking in trespasses and sins. We walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit of the world that works in the sons of disobedience. Now that we are in Christ, we must walk differently. Now that we are in Christ, we are no longer to walk as the Gentiles do. In this particular passage (**Ephesians 4:17-24**), Paul is making a play on words. Earlier in the letter, he had been comparing and contrasting Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). Now, he is using that word Gentile to refer to anyone who hasn't entered Christ. We are supposed to change the way we walk.
- C. Outside of Christ, our thinking is futile. Our understanding is blinded. Our hearts are hard. Our minds are calloused. Our desires are deceitful. And some people, even once they have entered Christ seem to think the way to walk in Christ is to simply continue walking the way they always have, waiting on the Lord to just take over. I remember a lightbulb moment I once had reading a book in which the author was talking about trying to overcome his addictions and he said, "I constantly prayed for God to take it away until I realized that what I really meant was 'so I don't have to give it up.'" Some make the mistake of *I'm* going to beat this. Others make the mistake of I'm never going to beat this so why bother trying.
- D. What must we do? Paul explains we must put off the old man. That is, we must put off those old actions, old behaviors, old words, old thoughts, old habits, old responses. Sure, the folks who still live by them will think we are weird. But we must be renewed in the spirit of our mind. We need to think in new ways, not in the old futile ways. Then Paul explains we must put on the new man. Then he explains that the new man is the one that is created after the likeness of God. That is, remember that back in **Ephesians 2:10**, Paul said we are God's workmanship created by God in Christ Jesus. Now in **Ephesians 4:24** he takes up that theme again, but this time we learn that while God does the creating, we must put on that creation. God has created a new you in Jesus Christ, but once you are in Jesus Christ you must put that new you on. We can't put on the new man without God's recreation, but God won't force us to walk as His new creations.

III. Mistake #3: Me and God got this.

- A. I imagine the other two mistakes were not all that shocking to you. However, having learned the other two, we probably think the idea that "Me and God got this" is the perfect response to those mistakes. It shows God and me working together to make a new me. And in a sense, this would work. The issue is not so much that this statement is a mistake. The issue is that way most folks usually apply this statement is a mistake. Paul actually addresses this in **Ephesians 4:24** in a really cool play on words.
- B. In **Ephesians 4:22-24**, the ESV translates "old man" and "new man" as "old self" and "new self." I appreciate that. I believe the translators' goal is to avoid the sexist notion that these promises are only for males. "Self" is not a bad translation because while the word translated here can be translated "man," it is the generic word that means "human" without real emphasis on gender, the same way we often use the word "man" to mean humankind instead of male. However, I keep using the phrases "old man" and "new man" not because I'm sexist or a language purist, but because the use of "self" here causes us to miss an enlightening play on words and themes that Paul makes in **Ephesians**.

- C. In **Ephesians 4:24**, Paul actually has a dual meaning behind this idea of put on the new man created by God. As we have already noted, he is hearkening back to **Ephesians 2:10**. We must individually put on the new person God has created us to be. However, he is also connecting to **Ephesians 2:15-16**. Notice very specifically in the explanation that God is creating a new man. These are the same words he uses in **Ephesians 4:24**. God created one new man out of two old men.
- D. If you are reading from **Ephesians** for the first time today, that is going to be very confusing. Let me give you a little background. In this letter, Paul is talking to Jews and Gentiles who have become Christians. He is pointing out that they need to be united or become one in Christ. The two men in **Ephesians 2:15** refers to the Jews under the Law of the Mosaic covenant as one man and the Gentiles outside of the Mosaic Law as the second. But by the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross, God has brought them together into one body and created one new man. What is that body? According to **Ephesians 1:22-23**, the one body is Christ's church with Jesus Christ as the head of the one body. In other words, in **Ephesians 4:24**, I cannot put on the new man apart from being part of the one new man: Christ's church. If you want a new you in the new year, you need Christ's church. The modern concept of Christians being spiritual without being religious, meaning we have our own personal relationship with Jesus without having one with a local congregation is foreign to Paul.
- E. To Paul, the church and the local manifestations of it are the perfect joining together and demonstration of God's answer to the first two mistakes we have discovered. Jesus Christ is no longer physically present on the earth. Rather, His body, the church remains as His hands and feet. Jesus Christ works through His church. However, we, as individual Christians are supposed to be active members and participants in the congregational life and work (see **Ephesians 4:15-16**). As we fit these pieces together, we see what the actual mistake behind "Me and God got this" really is. On the one hand, that statement is true. If it really is God and you working on this, you do got it. However, most of the time when people are saying, "Me and God got this," the practical working out ends up being, "I'm working on this on my own." In fact, if you are thinking you and God got this, but you are not part of a local church, working to be united with other people, joining hands in the fellowship of worship, work, and growth, you are deceiving yourself. If you aren't working with Christ's church, then you aren't working with God on the new you.

Conclusion:

Are you looking for a new you in the new year? Don't make these three common mistakes. Without God through Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit, you cannot possibly be a new you no matter how hard you try. However, if you just sit back and wait for God to take over and force a new you upon you, it won't happen. Finally, don't deceive yourself. If you aren't working with God's church on a new you, you aren't working with God on a new you. Finally, there is a fourth mistake people make. They give up when they make mistakes. They give up when they stumble and fall. They give up when the old man rears its ugly head. Walking with the Lord in His new creation is a growth process. We all make mistakes. Like walking physically, we all stumble and trip sometimes. Don't give up when that happens. Put your hand back in God's, get back up on your spiritual feet, and back to walking. And remember, we, Christ's church, are here to help. Let us know how we can.