

PART TWO CHRISTIANS

OPENING PRAYER

Lord bless this group of warrior men. Lord we ask that you use this message today to equip us for the spiritual battle we fight on your behalf. Lord give us strength and Godly wisdom today that we might live out our faith as we've pledged to do as Men of Covenant. Let the Holy Spirit guide us so each day so we are more holy than the last. We praise you today lord as the King we submit to and Kingdom we fight for. Lord, we pray for victory for each of us here today, in your honor and to your glory.

Amen

PREMISE

Before we dig into today's message, I wanted to share a related thought. There's a piece of paper sitting in front of you that will help explain. You'll notice it's written out as a formula. Don't worry, it's not heavy math.

According to the Pew Research Center, there are about 210 million professing Christians in the US.

[There are 333mm people in the US – so Christians represent approx 63% of entire US populations]

They became Christians through placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus himself then says (Matthew 16:24] that to follow him we must take up our cross.

Paul calls that "working out" our faith.

SO ... 210MM Christians working out their faith should make a HUGE difference here on earth ... but has it?

210MMi

+ Saving Faith

+ Work Out

= Christ on earth (A better world)

What do we see in the world as evidence that our country is being influenced in by all of us Christians?

- 18MM US children (nearly 25%) live in a home without a Father
- 60-70% of evangelical Christian men are in sexual sin
- Half of US Christians say that sex between unmarried consenting adults is sometimes or always acceptable
- 75% of Christian young people fall away from the faith after High School (93% remain when both parents are faithfully engaged)
- Only 32% of identifying born again Christians say that there is such a thing as absolute moral truth (only 9% of Born Again teens)
- 54% of Christians say that Homosexuality "should be accepted" (vs discouraged)
- 62% of Americans say that abortion should be legal in all or most cases (Surely not a single Christian could support the murder of babies – God does not)
- 6% of American adults claim to have a biblical world view (but that's out of 63% who say they are Christians)

This doesn't add up. Some part of this formula must be broken or not working very well. The influence of 210MM Christians living out their faith should absolutely bowl this country over with God's influence, but instead we see statistics that at contrary to the logic.

When half of the Christian populations says premarital sex is “OK”, there is now little difference between a Christian and the secular world. When 90% of born again teens miss the fact that the BIBLE is the source of all truth and it IS absolute – how will they ever know “the truth”? Christian parents claim that it is VERY important that they pass along their religious beliefs to their children. But their words don’t align with their expected outcomes where we see 75%, or fully three quarters of their children fall away from the faith when they graduate high school.

Before we continue, I’m not condemning a single one of them. Not one. Who am I to know their hearts? Only God knows their condition, not me. I just know in my heart something is not quite right and the best place to find resolution to big problems is to look to the bible and then look in a mirror. Let’s begin

OF RESOLUTIONS

Let's begin today's message by keeping the formula we just discussed in the back of our minds as we shift to the timely topic of A NEW YEAR

When a new year clicks by, the word RESOLUTION gets used a lot

The dictionary definition of a "Resolution" is:

- A firm decision to do something.
- A course of action determined or decided on.

New Years Resolution:

To make a promise, usually to yourself, that you will take action to improve something about yourself. It may be starting a behavior you wish you were already doing or stopping a habit you wish you never had begun.

Outcome: The expectation is that the new behavior becomes the "habit" and you then begin to reap the beneficial outcomes of acting (or not) in a certain way

- Eat better = lose weight, look better, live longer
- Workout = feel better, look better, live longer

For 2023, a Forbes Health/OnePoll survey found these resolutions and goals to be the most common

- Improve mental health (45%)
- Improve fitness (39%)
- Lose weight (37%)
- Improve diet (33%)
- Improve finances (30%)

New Years resolutions depend on you to fulfill them – they are essentially a contract or a promise to yourself. So how good are we at fulfilling those contracts we make every December 31st? What Percentage of New Year's Resolutions Fail?

Well, failing at New Year's resolutions is so common that January 17 has been unofficially designated as "Ditch New Year's Resolutions Day", while other folks have offered the second Friday in January as "Quitter's Day." Just 11% of New Years resolutions last at least six months, with almost a third of them flaming out in under 2 months. In other words, we are NOT very good at keep promises to ourselves

My message today is NOT about the value of making a New Years resolution. If you want to commit to losing some weight, learning a new skill or eating healthier – by all means, go for it! Today's message is about examining the impact of resolutions in the context of our faith

IMPACT TO THE CHRISTIAN

Does our faith say we should do something every December 31st? Well as you probably know there's nothing no chapter or verse on New Years Resolutions in the Bible. However ... there are VERY CLEAR references to the concept of "NEW" and the act of "RESOLVING" to do something.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old one has passed away; behold the new has come.

Now let's quickly go back to the dictionary definition of "resolution" as being:
"A Firm decision to do something"

As Christians have we ever made a "Firm decision to do something"?

Of course we have ... the moment we all accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior

Then logically speaking, the biggest "resolution" the Christian has ever made has been to confess his sins and place his faith in Jesus Christ.

You've RESOLVED to accept God's gift of redemption through his Son Jesus. You place your faith in Him, and are now saved by his sacrificial act of propitiation on the cross

The Bible doesn't say this BUT for illustration purposes, let's call that resolution "PART ONE"

Part ONE – Place faith in Jesus

I'm assuming that ALL in attendance here today have made that confession of faith in Jesus, asked for forgiveness of your sins and accepted him as your personal savior ... thanks to Jesus, Part ONE for us is completed

But, did you know the bible demands a 2 part response to God's offer? I would even offer that you risk losing your position in PART ONE if you don't pursue PART TWO

Let's let Jesus remind us what this "second part" is all about

Matthew 16:24

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple **MUST** deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Part TWO – Take up your cross and follow Him

Jesus says that we **MUST** "take up" our crosses if we are to follow him. What did he mean? Did he mean that we must suffer as he did? Not necessarily. His instructions here were related to the fact that the cross represented death and He was saying that those who choose to follow him **MUST DIE** to themselves. Your desires and your agenda go away – and are replaced with Gods plan for your life

1 John 2:17

The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

We are committing to **FOLLOWING** Jesus, to turning our backs on the world. We are expected to die to ourselves and want what **GOD WANTS**, not what we want. We are expected to shift our priorities to things that **GOD** wants us to do, not **JUST** what we want to do

Dying to yourself, giving up control of “self” is a big ask. But the process of taking up your cross, dying to yourself and actually FOLLOWING Jesus, is NOT a hidden act. It’s visible. You change. Things in your life change. What you care about changes – because of all that, the world around you is changed for the better. And when we DON’T see that change impacting the world, it’s because too many people in the church of Jesus Christ are “professors of faith” but NOT PART TWO sold out followers taking up their cross to fulfill Gods mission for their lives

Jesus told us Matthew 5:16

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"

Taking up YOUR cross, dying to yourself, should create a seismic shift in a Christian. It should be so completely obvious to the others (both believer and non-believer) that they say things like “boy, you’re like a completely different person!” Some of your old friends won’t even like you anymore! LEAVING the world behind and FOLLOWING Jesus will create a brand new person operating in the will of God

FAST OR SLOW?

PART ONE - Placing faith in Jesus and being born again can happen in a flash. It’s done in a single act of a confession of faith. But what about this PART TWO expectation of carrying our cross and following him? Does that happen in a flash too? In a word - NO

Philippians 2:12-13

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Notice here that Paul says “work **out**, not “work for” ... so we can rest assured that our salvation is not based on works. Paul uses the term “work out” purposefully to describe a PROCESS. Anything described as a process takes place OVER TIME. This means the Christian is to be involved, engaged, ever moving forward, always working out their Christianity “for His good purpose”. Your involved in the PART 2 process of sanctification for one reason – for His purposes

To RESOLVE to follow Jesus is not something that is done based on the calendar, but based on the spirit. Once this resolution has been made, the calendar disappears for the Christian. January 1st holds no power or special significance. Every day is a day we can use to sin less, pray more, witness and grow closer to God

LOVE AND DEPEND ON GOD

To live out our faith after salvation requires that we are in LOVE with God. It’s not enough to be happy with the GIFT he gave us. We have to understand the scale and depth of his sacrifice. We have to love Him more than our families, even more than our own lives. Loving Him demands a relationship with Him. A relationship with Him demands time with Him. Time with Him is measured as worship and prayer. We can’t fully achieve PART TWO without it.

Being in LOVE with Jesus drives us to want to be more like him, to be more holy, more pure, more pleasing each moment in his sight. Faith that is driven from relationship with Jesus will always produce

good fruit – fruit that we produce for Gods kingdom and NOT for worldly credit. Henry Fosdick put it this way ... “The steady discipline of intimate friendship with Jesus results in men becoming like Him.”

If loving Him requires are relationship built on worship and prayer, then what type of relationship does Jesus call us to? Interestingly ... it’s a relationship of ‘DEPENDENCE’

Matthew 18:13

And He (Jesus) said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Contrary to the literal reading of this verse, Jesus is NOT telling us to be immature children. Rather, He is telling us to be as dependent on him as children are dependent on their parents for everything. Be as children as you approach God means: be humble, respect Him, revere Him, love Him, depend on Him, ask His guidance in your life and walk with Him.

Let’s go to the bible to learn what it takes to be a Christian that is totally dependent on God.

A saved Christian who is now in the PART TWO process of dying to themselves and following Jesus. What must we DO to live out this resolution we made and fulfill BOTH parts of it?

EXPECTATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN RESOLUTION

Walk in the light!

1 John 1:6

If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.

In verse 6 John is telling us that if we’ve decided to follow Christ, that the natural response will be that our LIVES will change! We will BE different in how we act in our daily lives. We will APPEAR different to others. When we begin to walk in the light, we enter an unending process of aligning ourselves to Christ and the biblical standards of His word.

Matthew Henry

“it is known that to WALK, in scripture account, is to order and frame the course and actions of the moral life, that is of the life so far as it is capable of subjection to the divine law.”

1 John 1:6 tells us how we should appear to others if we are walking in the light of Christ, while Matthew Henry explains HOW we are to get there; by ordering and framing our lives to match the biblical standards of divine law

Praying daily, sinning less, removing all “recurring sin”, loving all people (agape kind of love), giving of yourself to help others (time, money, attention), humbling yourself, controlling fleshly issues of temper, lust, anger, hatred ... are all reflections of a Christian who is walking in the light of Christ.

Dwight Moody put it this way ... “We are told to let our light shine, and if it does, we won't need to tell anybody it does. Lighthouses don't fire cannons to call attention to their shining- they just shine.”

Ordering our lives to mirror our faith, is PART 2 of being a Christ following Christian

Don't love the world!

1 John 2:15

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.

As a Christian, parts of the world should make us sick with righteous anger and disgust.

Ask yourself ...

- What worldly movies do you watch? Change them!
- What worldly books do you read? Change them!
- What worldly podcasts do you listen to? Change them!
- How much time do you spend on Social Media? Change it!

Change them to what you might ask?

Well, many things on this list are done for entertainment purposes. As a result, they are done on our free time. One of the best ways to turn your back on worldly entertainment, is to SUBSTITUTE BIBLE STUDY time for one of these. Willingly and purposefully shifting an hour of our time away from reading a novel to reading Gods word demonstrates where your priorities lie

Falling in love w/God and out of love with the world is PART 2 of being a Christ following Christian

Stay in the faith!

1 John 2:24

As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

Sounds easy right? Well we are warned in the bible that it is NOT easy. Story after old testament story testifies that even Gods chosen people had a recurring struggle staying faithful. The new testament is filled with warnings in the same vain. Here's another warning from Hebrews

Hebrews 3:12

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

This verse uses 2 Greek words, apistias (unbelieving) and apostēnai (fall away) Apostēnai is the word from which we get our English word "apostasy", the definition of which is "a defiance of an established system or authority; a rebellion; an abandonment or breach of faith." For the purposes of our discussion, let's focus on the words "DEFIANCE and REBELLION"

Peter Heck a Christian writer for the website "Not The Bee" (it's a more serious sister site owned by the Babylon Bee) says ... "The road to apostasy begins with a four-word question. They're the same four words that worked so masterfully against Eve in the Garden of Eden and have proven effective on countless humans ever since." **"Did God really say?"** Questioning God is the beginning of rebellion

John 2:27

As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him.

The Gospel is such a simple message. God made the path to salvation simple. Be on guard for the newest “interpretation” or the latest and greatest doctrine “discovered” by someone that had a revelation from God. God never intended the path to him to be complicated. Yes, the gate IS NARROW, but the path is straight and clear. When the Gospel message appears in a “new form” or an overly complex way – be wary. John is warning us here to test everything against the Holy Spirit USING Gods word. The Gospel can only be found in Gods word, in the TRUTH of Gods word in the Holy Bible. Be on guard for anyone leaving parts of it out, adding anything new or professing doctrine that goes against Gods nature. When you hear something that doesn’t sound quite right – ask the Holy Spirit guide you with discernment and then open your bible to find understanding

Staying in the faith is PART 2 of being a Christ following Christian

Keep his commandments!

1 John 2:3-4

Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.

This sounds simple enough and a quick check of my behavior confirmed for me that I had not committed adultery or murder, but WAIT ... Did I???

1 John 3:15

Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

There have been occasions in the past where I did not show love for a fellow believer. According to our savior Jesus Christ, I broke the 6th commandment.

John Wesley said of the end of this verse: “and no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” — But every loving believer hath. For love is the beginning of eternal life. It is the same, in substance, with glory.

We find Jesus in the book of Matthew, taking a similar approach to the 7th commandment

Matthew 5:28

But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

As we pursue a closer walk with Jesus, the 10 commandments deserve a closer inspection. Read them with fresh eyes and understand the impact Jesus had on them. He RAISED THE BAR for all of us

Living up to these new 10 commandment standards is PART 2 of being a Christ following Christian

Love one another!

1 John 2:9

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness.

This is a hard one. I don't know about you but this verse is always a "mic-drop" moment for me. I feel so convicted by this verse because I've found myself on the wrong side of it at times. God knew how important this was to his people. He knew the beauty of what happens in the heart of a believer that follows this command. He knew that so many other sins are simply "short circuited" when this command is followed. Hurtful comments are left unsaid, lies are simply never spread and emotional pain is reduced in the church body.

Hurt by somebody in this church? Love them, then forgive them! We should love one another (and forgive each other) because that's what JESUS did for us. The evidence of your fellowship with Jesus is when you show grace and love to your brothers and sisters in Christ

Showing Christlike love to all believers, all the time is PART 2 of being a Christ following Christian

Stop sinning!

1 John 3:9

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.

- Lustful eyes?
- White lies?
- Gossiping?
- Short fuse?
- Cussing?
- Sexual sin?

Removing these nagging, recurring sins is a straightforward bible based process

1. Repent immediately – don't wait, humble yourself right away and gain an advantage on satan
2. Embed his Word in heart to use against the devil when you are tempted – just as Jesus did
3. Pray daily for the Holy Spirit to guide you in victory over your flesh and sin

Eliminating recurring sin is PART 2 of being a Christ following Christian

OF MEN

Our message today would be incomplete without a nod to the fact that the group is all male. Men have an added reasons to be fully engaged in the PART 2 process of sanctification.

As attending members of "Men of Covenant" we pledge to behave in a certain manner. Let's review our #1 Covenant pledge:

God: We will be Men of Covenant with God through faith in Christ. We will **LIVE OUT** our faith with loyalty, commitment and passion. We will faithfully worship, preach the gospel, pray, read and obey the word and win the fight for sexual purity.

There's a lot to unpack in that single covenant statement! It starts with a declaration of faith in Jesus. As it should. Nothing matters if we don't begin with Jesus. But the covenant pledge continues by adding that we will **LIVE OUT** our faith and then it spells out some of the examples of what that will look like. Gentleman, our very first covenant pledge is a perfect example of we, as Christian Men, fully embracing PART 2 of the Christian life

By attending this session and your small groups sessions, you have made a defacto pledge to jump into PART 2 with both feet - according to the words of our covenant pledge "with loyalty, commitment and passion". What does some of that look like? Again, going back to the words of our #1 covenant pledge, we will be FAITHFULLY: worshiping, preaching the gospel, praying, reading and obeying gods word and winning the fight for sexual purity.

Guys – if we DON'T faithfully do these things, if we DON'T fully embrace the LIVING OUT part of being a Christian Man, if we stall out on the PART 2 of our relationship with God, then we have NO HOPE of delivering on the next 4 pledges. Why??

Because the next covenant pledge is about leading your family in WISDOM IN GODS WAYS
The one after that is about engaging and supporting the church with PRAYER AND SERVITUDE
After that it's about edifying, encouraging and PURSUING HOLINESS with each other as Men
Lastly, we pledge to stand against the spirit of the age and change our country

How can we do ANY OF THIS if we don't first change ourselves?

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

If you're saved, then God's already inside you

- Let the Holy Spirit take you through the PART 2
- Be that "new man" that Paul's talks about in 2nd Corinthians
- Lead your family in holiness and bless this church
- And along the way, let's help each other so, as Men - we can change the world for Christ

Let's read from Luke and then close in prayer:

Luke 6:46-48

Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.

Jesus is not saying that we need to "work our way" to heaven - obedience is not what saves—BUT our salvation and our love for Christ WILL produce obedience. He's saying there are tremendous benefits to "putting His words into practice" that there REALLY IS a PART 2 to being a Christian. That there is FRUIT after FAITH. That when we ORDER our lives to our faith, when we RESOLVE to be PART 2 Christians – He tells us that we will have a faith AND life built around God that can NOT be shaken.

Let's ask the Holy Spirit to guide us as we each become one of those 210MM Christians that take up our own cross and shine our light on this world as we wait in anticipation of the next.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord we place our faith in you and only you, NOW help us all resolve OR re-commit to walking with you using your holy scripture and the 5 pledges of the Men of Covenant. Lord I pray that you stir us men to be so in love with you that we feel an overwhelming passion to be like you, to love the things you love, to see others as you see them, to pray and worship as YOU DID here on earth.

Amen

<https://www.forbes.com/health/mind/new-years-resolutions-statistics/>

<https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/following-jesus-christ/>

<https://bible.org/seriespage/8-work-out-your-salvation-process-sanctification>

<https://notthebee.com/article/andy-stanley-and-the-road-to-apostasy--a-christian-response>