
NEW CREATION RESOLUTIONS

(2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

At the beginning of every year many people all around the world begin to attempt to keep their New Year's resolutions. Back in 2016 *Eyewitness New Chicago* had a segment where they said that the top five resolutions, according to one study, were: (5) Save more, spend less; (4) Spend more time with family and friends; (3) Lose weight; (2) Live a healthier lifestyle; and (1) Enjoy life to the fullest. That last one is quite vague isn't? Leaving that aside, if you do have New Year's Resolutions I hope they are not relegated to weight-loss, exercise, and money accrual. Don't get me wrong, I do think Christians should be health-conscious and financially solvent but I don't think we should join the stampede of the world to run aimlessly after means as though they were ends.

Perhaps more foundationally, before joining in or abstaining from resolution making, we ought to address the stirring theological question that perhaps many of you are asking, "Are New Year's Resolutions Biblical?" And if so, does the Bible give us any insight as to what they should be and why they should be made? I think the Scripture provides us with answers to each of those questions. And to see that we will turn to an incredible passage of Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.

Into the Text

Now as we come to our text, which is the end of the opening section of 2 Thessalonians (the chapter breaks in this epistle all seem to fall in the right places) we come to Paul's description of the prayers he and his co-laborers prayed for the church in Thessalonica. Immediately preceding this report is a commendation for the Thessalonians, given the fact that their faith was growing and their love was abounding even as they were suffering (1:3-4), and a promise/ pronouncement that Jesus would return, and when He did their enemies would receive retribution and His people would revel in His glorious appearing (5-10). So the immediate backdrop to the prayer description of verses 11 and 12 is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

With that let us read our text, 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 11 and 12 where we read...

Verses 11-12

***11* Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and the work of faith with power, *12* that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Therefore we also pray always for you. Here Paul is about to describe *the way* he prayed for the Thessalonians (1:11-12) but then later on in the letter we see examples of some Spirit-inspired, seemingly spontaneous, 'in-letter' prayers. In chapter two Paul prayed that God would comfort their hearts and establish them in every good word and work (2:16-17). In chapter three Paul prayed for them that the Lord would direct their hearts into the love of God and into the patience of

Christ (3:5). And, by way of a concluding benediction, he prayed, “Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way” (3:16a). What we find here in our text, then, distinguished from those ‘in-letter prayers’ is a description of the overall thrust, aim, and trajectory of his prayers for them.

- **We... pray** – This wasn’t just Paul’s personal prayer trajectory for them; it was an aim shared among his co-laborers, specifically, Paul, Silas, and Timothy (1:1).
- **Always** – The Greek adverb used here is *pantote* (Gr. πάντοτε) and it means just that – “always, at all times, ever” (Strong’s). The aims found in this prayer were not occasional ‘guest appearances’ they were ‘regulars’ in his *perpetual* intercession for them.
- **For you** – And lest we miss the object of Paul’s prayers, it was the Thessalonians. Christians described as those who believed Paul’s testimony (vs.10). They were people of exceeding faith and abounding love (vs.3), people marked by faith and patience in the midst of tribulations and persecution (vs.4). In fact, they were so marked by Christian character, and their reception of the Word of God was so apparent with much fruit following, both in the way they turned to Christ and turned away from idols, that Paul could write in his first epistle to them, “knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God” (1 Thes. 1:4).

Well, what did Paul always pray for them? Here it is...

that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all [every] *the good pleasure of His* [“His” is the translators insertion] **goodness and the work of faith with power** – Here are the petitions that Paul always prayed for them. Before we ask what Paul meant by that first petition let us look at *who* He expects to fulfill each of those petitions. He was looking for God to count the Thessalonians “**worthy of [their] calling**”; and he was looking for God to fulfill their every desire for **goodness** and to bring about **the work of faith with power**. This short encapsulation of what Paul prayed for them that is saturated with confidence in the benevolent omnipotence of God leveraged towards the sanctification of His people and, as we shall see, the glorification of his name (vs.12).

Well, back to that first petition. What does it mean when Paul said, “**that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling.**” Well the ESV renders it, “that our God may make you worthy of his calling.” The footnote in the NASB acknowledges that “make” is a legitimate possibility. But the NKJV and NASB have, I think, the more precise translation with “count.” The idea of that Greek word (Gr. *axioó*) is ‘to reckon as.’ Ultimately, the two ideas are compatible because the God who *counts* or reckons His people as living in a way that is worthy of their calling is the God who has compelled/ made such a person to live worthy of their calling. So then this is what Paul prayed for them - that they, having been called *by* God, would be reckoned by God as living up to the calling that they had received *from* Him.

Defining Calling

It’s important to note that Paul is acknowledging a calling that happened. The Bible does use the word “calling” in a *general way* - “many are called but few are chosen” (Mt. 22:14). That describes the Gospel call (i.e. the invitation to come to Christ) that is to be issued to all people. But then, much more often, the New Testament uses the word “calling” in a *salvific-specific way* - “whom [God] predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified

he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30). Likewise Paul described the Romans as “called to belong to Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:6) and “called to be saints” (Rom. 1:7). Paul said that the saints in Corinth were called into fellowship with God’s Son (1 Cor. 1:9). Paul saw himself as set apart from the womb but in time called by God’s grace (Gal. 1:15). And it’s that kind of calling that is in view here. They, the saints in Thessalonica, were called with a gracious, sovereign, predetermined irresistible call.

But notice this is *not* a prayer to keep the called... called. This is a prayer for Christian maturity so that the called will live up to the calling. It’s similar to how Paul exhorted the Ephesians saying, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1). It is not a prayer that the called would be reckoned worthy enough to stay called. It’s a prayer that the called live up to the calling. In fact, Paul even used this kind of language in his earlier epistle to them. He reminded them how he and his co-laborers charged every one of them, as father does with own his children, “that [they] walk in a manner worthy of God who calls [them] into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thes. 2:12). It’s as though Paul was praying for the fulfillment of that. That God would reckon them as indeed living up to, more so and more so, the high calling they received to be sons and daughters of God.

What Does it Mean to Live Worthy of God’s Calling?

And if you were to ask, “what does walking worthy not mean and what does it mean?” First, because we know that we have not attained nor have we been made perfect (Phil. 3:12), and because we cannot say we have no sin (1 Jn. 1:8) or that we are free from indwelling sin (Rom. 7:18,25), we can say that worthiness *is not* perfection; rather, it is, as one commentator put it, God’s merciful assessment. It is not living worthy enough to be called; rather, it is living in such a way that lives up to the calling a believer has in Christ!

As for what a worthy walk looks like, reading through Colossians 1:9-12, Ephesians 4:1-3, and Philippians 1:27-28 provide numerous examples of the characteristics of such a walk:

⁹ For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. (Col. 1:9-12 NKJV)

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3 NKJV)

²⁷ Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. (Phil. 1:27-28 NKJV)

Paul's Supplication, Our Pursuit and Our Instruction

Given the fact that this was Paul's Spirit-inspired prayer it should, then, as a result, be our pursuit. We shouldn't look on as disinterested spectators saying, 'Well isn't that something? Paul is praying for them. Interesting...' Nor should we simply say, 'You know what, okay, I'll start praying this for other people.' Rather, if it is God's will that we live a life worthy of the calling we received, we should pursue that, by His grace, and expect that, by His Spirit.

Furthermore, Paul's example should help us prioritize our prayers. Along these lines D.A. Carson, in his book *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, wrote,

But judging by this example of Paul's praying, it should already be clear that our chief concern in petition must not be that we might become successful, wealthy, popular, healthy, brilliant, triumphant, happy, or beautiful. Still less does Paul encourage us to pray that all our problems will disappear. Paul's prayer is constrained by the framework he brings to it: he prays for more signs of the grace for which he has already thanked God, and he prays with eternity's values in view.

D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*, Baker Academic, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1992), 54.

Think of how many lesser things we can often pray for, particularly as it relates to others. And it's not that we shouldn't ever pray for lesser things, but nonetheless, when we look at the example of Paul, he prayed for those things that were the most important for the greatest reason. These kinds of priorities ought to be reflected in our prayers.

To the next petitions...

That brings us to the next petitions. (Remember the italicized words are translator insertions.) Paul continued by saying that he prayed that God would “**fulfill all [every] *the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power.***” Literally, that first petition could be read as, “fulfill every good pleasure of goodness.” The sense is nonetheless well caught in the NASB which reads, “fulfill every desire for goodness.” These Thessalonians had new hearts and renewed minds and as such they had new desires, new affections, and new pleasures. And Paul was praying that God would fulfill all those new longings for goodness.

What is comprised in that word “goodness?” Most immediately, I think of sanctification; after all, goodness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit; in fact, the same word that is used here is used in Galatians 5:22. It was part-and-parcel of living out the new nature. In Ephesians 5:8 Paul wrote, “⁸For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the Spirit [NU reads “light] *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth).” I think, most particularly here, the idea is that the Christians in Thessalonica were desiring to see Christ formed in them and Christ live through them, they were looking for their flesh to be mortified, and for their hearts and minds to be further and further sanctified. And, as one cannot truly desire goodness unless it is connected to doing good – to all men and especially the household of faith (Gal. 6:10) – I do think there is an inevitable interpersonal outworking of the goodness spoken of here. That comes across even more clearly in the next part of the petition...

And every work of faith by his power. The expression work-of-faith speaks of those works that are prompted by, and sparked by, faith. In his first epistle to the Thessalonians Paul gave thanks to God for their work of faith (1 Thes. 1:3). And true faith does just that – it works; it looks for ways to please God, serve people, advance the Gospel, shine God’s light, and so on.

This is important. In another three-chapter epistle this emphasis is hard to miss. In Titus 2 the apostle Paul described God’s redeemed and purified people as those who are “zealous for good works” (Ti. 2:14). In Titus 3:5a Paul wrote, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.” And likewise in Titus 3:14, “And let our *people* also learn to maintain good works, to *meet* urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.”

Clearly, in light of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, the Christians in Thessalonica had a faith that was ready, willing, and looking to work.

Notice also that the sought after driving force behind these prospective works of faith was not the Thessalonians’ strength but God’s power. It’s as though Paul was saying, ‘May God grant you the power to accomplish every good work that your faith in God and Christ prompts you to do.’

An Incredible Prayer with Incredible Ramifications

Have you ever prayed that for those in your local church? If you have, great; if not, then may Paul’s Spirit-inspired example not only instruct you but excite you. There may be people in your local assembly who have desires to do works of faith in Jesus’ name towards the poor or imprisoned, towards those overseas or down in the street, and you can pray even as Paul did – that God would fulfill such works by His power. For those who have holy desires for goodness, you can pray that God’s Spirit would fulfill those desires and that, as a result, they would live a life reckoned worthy of the calling they received.

But what about you and me? Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians should provide us with a reminder that we ought to have such holy desires! These are what we might call – new creation resolutions. Do not limit your resolutions to exercise, weight loss, and money accrual; rather, be sure that you have Christian plans and kingdom goals to see Christ formed in you, to treasure His goodness, and have His Spirit prompt works of faith through you.

The Aim of New Creation Resolutions

And here’s the purpose of Paul’s petitions in verse eleven, here is why Paul was praying that God would fulfill all their good pleasures of goodness and works of faith,

that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (vs.12)

This is the reason: so that as your desires for goodness are fulfilled and as your works of faith are accomplished, **the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in you.** When Christ is more and more formed in you, the character of Christ is more readily seen through you. When that’s happening – men are seeing your good works and glorifying your Father in heaven (Mt. 5:16). When that’s happening men will know you’re Jesus’ disciples by your love for one another (Jn. 13:35). When that happens the Father is glorified in you bearing fruit (Jn. 15:8). When that happens

even nonbelievers who speak against you as an evil doer will nonetheless see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation (1 Pet. 2:12).

But what about the next part... “**and you in Him?**” Following D.A. Carson’s line of explanation, first you notice a problem – God doesn’t share His glory with another so how are we glorified in Jesus? One possibility is - Romans 8:30 in the long term and perhaps 2 Corinthians 3:18 in the short term. According to Romans 8:30 it is God’s determined plan that everyone He has predestined will be called, justified, *and glorified*. No one falls off the wagon. All that are truly called are kept and glorified. And when they are glorified they remain uniquely made individuals but as uniquely made individuals they will bear perfect character conformation to the Lord who loved them and gave Himself for them. Now expanding that idea further, not only will they be glorified in that Romans 8:30 technical sense, but, following the train of the thought in verse 12, they will they will be *publically honored* as His beloved! Jesus will be honored as the Elder Brother and His people will be honored as His brethren.

But that character conformation also happens in the here-and-now and not just in the by-and-by. According to 2 Corinthians 3:18 as believers with spiritually-unveiled faces behold the glory of Christ, they “are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” And similar to the previous point, following the use of the word “glorified” as it related to the public honoring of Christ, believers in the here and now bear the honor of further imaging their Savior.

Paul concluded by saying how he expected this to happen, **according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ**. All of this would be a work of grace. The fountain and channel of which, to use an expression of from one commentary (Cambridge), was and is our God and Lord Jesus Christ. Interestingly, the second article, the one before “**Lord**” is not there in the Greek. As the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary notes, “There is but one Greek article to both, implying the inseparable unity of God and the Lord Jesus.” I would agree. The only question is – whether the verse is actually overtly identifying Jesus as God or is speaking about the Father and the Son. In the final analysis; however, we know that both the Father and the Son are the equal dispensers of grace to God’s people. And as such it is appropriate that Paul would petition God as he did.

Conclusion

Well, then, are New Year’s Resolutions allowable and/or Biblical? I’d say – new creation resolutions, to see God’s goodness manifested in and through your life, and to see Spirit-empowered works of faith fulfilled, to the end that the name of Christ be glorified in you and you in Him are not only allowable and Biblical, they are to be expected and the fulfillment of them is to be prayed for.

Resolve, then, by the grace of God for the glory of God on New Year’s Day and throughout the year.