

## “New Year’s Resolutions For The Consecrated”

Br. Ralph E. Gaunt

We feel that the Psalmist, David, gave us a good text with which to end the old year, and to begin the new. A portion of this Psalm we read every day, for it is our Morning Resolve: Psalm 116:7-18, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted. I said in my haste, All men are liars. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of his people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid; thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people."

Bro. Russell obviously felt that the sentiments of this psalm must be a daily thing in our lives--for the Morning Resolve is based upon these precepts. When we think of “New Year's Resolutions for the Consecrated” we feel that the only effective resolutions must be daily. To simply make resolutions at the beginning of a new year, is of little effect unless they are remembered daily. There is an old saying that "new year's resolutions are made to be broken". This may be so as far as the world is concerned--but with the true Christian resolutions are very serious matters. Our resolves are the whole foundation structure for the building of Christian character. Without resolves we are like a ship drifting aimlessly upon the sea, without an engine, without a sail, and without a rudder. The ship will never get to its destination--because it has none.

The Christian has a destination--on our ship we must set the sail, control the rudder, and keep the engine in good repair. This can only be done by resolves. For resolves give us direction and purpose; and resolves must be remembered daily.

We have a good list of resolves which we read every morning. But sometimes the obvious eventually becomes the unnoticed. It is possible to read our Morning Resolve and simply commit it to memory, completely overlooking the true value of it. In actuality, it is of supreme value! Its concepts and precepts, when applied to our lives daily, will transform the character into God-likeness.

The first thought in this Morning Resolve is one of complete consecration --a consecration that is born of gratitude for the goodness of God. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Most High." By placing this thought first in his resolve, Bro. Russell acknowledged the fact that consecration is a daily thing--not just something that we did one year ago or 20 years ago or 50 years ago. It should be remembered every day! And this is easier said than done, for we carry the fallen flesh with us every day.

The spirit of this resolution is a grateful appreciation for all that the Lord has done for us. To continually be in this attitude every day, we should remind ourselves daily of the things the Lord has done for us! --and they are many! Each of you probably could make your own personal list of what the Lord has done for you, and we recommend that you do so: it's a great deterrent to discouragement.

But perhaps we could list here a few of the general benefits which the Lord has given to us all: 1. God's love--God's forgiveness, the removing of fear from our hearts. 2. The ransom. 3. The imputed righteousness of Christ. 4. The hearing ear. 5. The revelation of prophecy. 6. The complete Harvest Message. 7. Beloved brethren. 8. Meetings and conventions. 9. Providences of the Lord. 10. Examples of faith and character, both in the Bible and in our brethren. These are just a few of the things that the Lord has done for us, even before we could really comprehend them--and some of them we cannot yet fully comprehend, but we can deeply appreciate them nevertheless. The appreciation of these things led us to say "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me." And it should be a question that we should ask every day.

In our Morning Resolve we have the answer to this question--the answer is complete consecration--this is what we will render unto the Lord daily. "I resolve that by the Lord's assisting grace I will today as a saint of God, fulfill my vows, continuing the work of sacrificing the flesh and its interests, that I may attain unto the heavenly inheritance in joint-heirship with my Redeemer."

And the Psalmist gives us God a view of this consecration. He says "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." This "death" is a daily laying down of our lives in grateful appreciation of the Lord's blessings. This is "precious" in the Lord's sight. It is really a staggering thought that we could be "precious" to Jehovah, yet the Scriptures tell us that He considers us so. Let's look at a few of these Scriptures, so we can realize more fully our relationship to Him.

Lam. 4:2, "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" James 5:7, "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." Mal. 3:17, "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels (margin: special treasure); and I will spare (Rotherham--dealeth tenderly with) them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

So we would suggest that one of our New Year's resolutions for 1971 is to rededicate ourselves daily!--to lay down our lives daily, in grateful appreciation for the blessings that the Lord has showered upon us. We recommend that it be a conscious effort that is really worked at.

The next resolve which Bro. Russell felt should be a daily objective is sincerity and simplicity of character—"I will strive to be simple and sincere toward all." Saying it, and really doing it are two far different things. Simplicity and a sincerity are not qualities that we can wear on the outside like an ornament. They are qualities that must come from within. A mere show of sincerity is more distasteful than none at all. Jesus severely rebuked the Pharisees of his day for this very kind of hypocrisy. (Matt. 23:27, 28)--"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

Compare this statement of Jesus with the description of the bride in Psalm 45--"The king's daughter is all glorious within." IT is the heart condition that the Lord is observing. Simplicity and sincerity are truly jewels, but they must shine from within. True Christians should be like the tents of Kedar--they were black on the outside, but within, they were glorious to behold. We should remember that the Lord looks upon the heart --even though sometimes our brethren are looking at the outside. If our brethren, by looking on the outside, see in us the qualities of sincerity, let us make very sure that it is the real thing. There is such a thing as "insincere sincerity," just as there is such a thing as "being proud of our humility." Both qualities are extremely unbecoming to the Christian.

There is a quality that is even recognized in the world as being of great value, and that is "integrity." It is worth dollars in the marketplace. Think what it is worth in the Christian life! Yet we have observed that it is sometimes lacking among the brethren. Let us resolve, for 1971, to develop inward sincerity and simplicity. Let us remember that those who are called the bride, are all glorious within.

Another resolve which we need to remember daily, is, "I will not please and honor self, but the Lord," An inherent quality in fallen human nature is selfishness. The survival of self--the glorifying of self--the worshipping of self, are all qualities which characterize the fallen nature. We are reminded of the words of the hymn, "The dearest object I have known, whate're that object be, I want to banish from thy throne, and worship only thee." Too often that throne contains self, instead of the Lord.

We may fool ourselves into thinking that we have put "self" down because we do not share the world's desires to be someone great in the community, or famous in our field of endeavor. Those things do not tempt the Christian. And so we think that we have no desire to honor self. But let us look further! How do we act in the Ecclesia? A brother once suggested to me that a big fish in a little pond can't even make a big splash. We are but a "little flock." Why, then, do the brethren politic for power in the Ecclesia? Do brethren want power in the Ecclesia because they think it will bring honor unto the Lord, or do they glory in the honor it will bring to themselves? It is a thought for very serious consideration. Sometimes this desire for power among the brethren expands beyond the home ecclesia. Then it becomes even worse. We've increased the size of the pond, so we can make a little bigger splash. It is impossible for me to see how personal power in the Ecclesia will bring honor to the Lord! I will not please and honor self, but the Lord. Let this be our daily resolve in 1971; and especially let us remember it in our Ecclesia activity.

Another resolve, closely related to this one, is "I will be careful to honor the Lord with my lips, that my words maybe unctuous and blessed to all." Sometimes our conversation among the brethren is certainly not honoring to the Lord. Sometimes we are passing on gossip which we have no way of knowing whether it be true or false. Sometimes we are evil-speaking about our brethren. These are the facts! I say it to our shame! We know of a completely false story that is being passed around concerning the Jackson Ecclesia. One or two brethren have bothered to check with us to see if it is true--others just pass it on. When we heard this story, we began to wonder how many things we had passed on to others without really knowing if it be true. It's such an easy temptation to fall into. We automatically think that "truth" brethren will be truthful! So we believe what they tell us, and pass it on as fact. When will we ever learn (and I'm speaking to myself as well), when will we ever learn that such words bring no honor to the Lord, and such words are not a blessing to others.

"I will be careful to honor the Lord with my lips, that my words may be unctuous and blessed to all." Oh! that we could really live by this resolve daily and hourly. It seems

lately that the rule we see displayed among the brethren is 'I will be careful to pass on all the gossip that I hear about the brethren with whom I disagree.'

We should be careful to honor the Lord with our lips when defending the doctrines of truth. A noble defense for truth is completely destroyed when we use harshness and vindictiveness. The truths which we are upholding may be pure, but our methods are sometimes not honoring to the Lord nor a blessing to the brethren. When we take this course, we actually do harm to these precious doctrines.

But guarding our words is very difficult. I think of all the resolves which we have, this one is the most difficult--it is nigh on impossible. James gives us his reasoning on this matter in James 3. He equates the ability to control the tongue with perfection. He says that no man can control and tame the tongue. "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity . . . it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature." But, lest we think that James is condoning an unruly tongue, let us consider verses 14 to 18, "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

The lesson that James is trying to get across to us is the difference between being controlled by the natural tendencies of the flesh, and being controlled by the spirit that is from above--the Holy Spirit. If we are controlled by the Holy Spirit we can and should control our tongues! We should be able to honor the Lord with our lips, that our words would be unctuous and blessed to all. We do not honor the Lord with our lips when we are a tale bearer among the brethren. We are actually bringing dishonor to part of the Lord a body! So in 1971, every day, and every hour, let us be very careful to honor the Lord with our lips, that our words may be unctuous and blessed to all.

The next resolve for 1971 is also a daily one!-- "I will be faithful to the Lord, the Truth, the brethren and all with whom I have to do, not only in great matters, but also in the little things of life." We hear a lot about fidelity to Truth, and rightly so--but to be faithful to the Lord involves much more than this.

We've often thought of the scene in the upper room at the time of the last supper. Jesus said one of his disciples would betray him. Their reaction is interesting. How would we react? Would we think out loud that it was probably Brother so-and-so because we had

never quite trusted him anyway. Would we immediately jump to our own defense, thinking that everyone was surely going to accuse us of being the one? Or would we refrain from speaking and simply harbor suspicion about several in the room? How did the disciples react? With one accord they said "Lord, is it I?" They were concerned about their own personal faithfulness. Oh that we could be more concerned with our own faithfulness to the Lord, instead of looking with suspicion at our brother. Let us ask ourselves "Lord is it I?" "Am I being faithful?"

How can we be faithful to the Lord? We can be faithful by trying to live up to all of His principles and precepts, not just those that appeal to the flesh, not just those that our brethren see, not just those that will bring us personal gain--but all of them. Being faithful to the Lord involves not being ashamed of our relationship with Him when dealing with the world. If we are ashamed of Him, then surely He will be ashamed of us. How can we be faithful to the Truth? One of the best ways of being faithful to the Truth is to know truth from error! Then, once having found truth, and separated it from error, having the courage to stand up for it, and to apply its standards and precepts to our daily lives. Sometimes we don't make ourselves very popular this way. But the Christian life is not a popularity contest--it is a lonely way. Absolute fidelity to truth when dealing with the world and sometimes even with our brethren, will automatically separate us from their inner circle, for they will feel that your very fidelity is a condemnation of them.

How can we be faithful to the brethren? You know we didn't choose our brethren--the Lord did! Sometimes we act as if we could accept them or reject them. That's not in our power! We could not disown our brethren even if we wanted to. We can choose our friends but not our relatives, and the brethren are our relatives. The Father did the calling--the Father did the drawing--the Father did the accepting--and the Father did the begetting! Who are we to say "you are not my brother?"

However, we must be aware of the fact that it is possible to have false brethren--wolves in sheep's clothing, whom the Father has never accepted nor begotten. Such will usually manifest themselves by a lack of fruitage. Where the fruits of the spirit are totally lacking, and the spirit of the world is obvious, we should avoid being influenced by such brethren. However, we still have a duty and a responsibility toward such--to love them and do good unto them as we have opportunity. (March 24, Songs In the Night text)

We are to be faithful "not only in great matters, but also in the little things of life." We would say especially in the little things of life--because few great things ever come along. The Christian life is built in the little everyday experiences. The Christian life is a daily and hourly endeavor. Real Christian development is made in the little things of life--that

character is manifest in the bigger things. But if it is not made in the little things, it will be sadly lacking when some big experience overwhelms us. In 1971--let us be faithful--faithful to the Lord, to the Truth, and to the brethren--and let us be careful that this faithfulness be in the little things.

The final thought in our resolve, is one of complete trust and confidence in the Lord--"trusting myself to Divine care and the Providential overruling of all my interests for my highest welfare, I will not only be pure in heart, but repel all anxiety, all discontent, all discouragement. I will neither murmur nor repine at what the Lord a providence may permit, because, Faith can firmly trust him, come what may."

A prerequisite to having complete faith and confidence in the Lord is to know and understand him and his character. Another necessity is to observe how the Lord's providences have worked in the lives of his saints, both in the past and in the present. We have the testimony of the Scriptures on this subject--we also have the testimony of the lives of our brethren today. But we have something even more personal, if we will only use it. We have the testimony of our own personal experiences.

It is sometimes possible to read of the Lord's overruling providences regarding the Apostles, or to hear of the Lord's protection over others of his saints with whom we may be acquainted, and then sort of have doubt that such things would work in our lives. For this reason we are going to make a recommendation--if nothing else is remembered from this discourse today, we ask that you remember this! First, try to think back over the year 1970 and recall to mind the times when you had evidence that the Lord overruled circumstances in your life and it worked out for your good--you received a blessing as a result of it. Think in specifics!--it's almost impossible isn't it?; unless such events were extremely outstanding--they were either overlooked, or, if noticed, they were soon forgotten.

But suppose we had a book in which we could find all of these experiences written, and besides the experiences we found the blessing they brought. Wouldn't we delight to find such a book? Wouldn't we be overjoyed to find that all these things that we found in this book had happened personally to us, and we had received all these blessings?! Oh, that such a book were written about each of us! Wouldn't we love to own one? We can, you know; but we will have to write it! Our suggestion to each of us for 1971 is to go to the store and buy a little notebook--it will not cost much, about 50¢ But for 50¢ we can have one of the greatest blessings of our life! Each time we have an evidence of the Lord's leading in our life, write it down and put the date beside it. No matter how small the incident may seem at the time. It's the small ones that are forgotten--but let us not forget

them--write them down! Throughout 1971 write down each blessing that the Lord gives us--write down each time He overrules the experiences of our life. Some of these experiences may be very personal. Our book is not for others, so let us not be afraid to write our inmost feelings in regard to these experiences; and let us be sure to record the blessing that each experience brought!

During the year our book will grow, and each of our experiences will become more precious to us. We will grow in an awareness of just how intimately the Lord is watching over us and caring for us. Experiences will not pass by unnoticed and unheeded--they will become Ebenezers. The awareness of these experiences will enable us to "repel all anxiety, all discontent, all discouragements." We only become discouraged because we can see only today, and we are fearful of tomorrow. We murmur against our experiences only because we lack faith that they will work out for our good. We can build a mountain of faith by simply writing down each evidence of the Lord's leading and blessing in our lives. If we keep such a book, we guarantee, that in 1972 we will be able to truly say from the heart--"Faith can firmly trust him, come what may."