

Resolution
Colossians 3:12-17
Colebrook Congregational Church
January 3, 2016 / 2nd Sunday After Christmas

Please note: The actual delivery of this sermon does not fully match that which written below

Today's selection is fitting for the New Year and it's accompanying tradition of setting resolutions to follow in the coming year. In his Letter to the Colossians, Paul is writing in response to a report he received from Epaphras, one of their ministers. The members of the church in Colossae had apparently incorporated pagan elemental spirits into their worship practices, so this letter declares the supremacy of Christ and exhorts the hearers to live godly lives.

The first half of the letter is concerned with doctrine and theology and the second half is about conduct and behavior. In the chapter leading up to our selection, Paul is warning against certain pagan vices, which is then mirrored by godly virtues in today's selection.

Paul begins with a metaphorical verb: "Put on," using the image of a garment to refer to an inward transformation that is required with one's acceptance of Christian life and also seems to reflect some of the symbolism used in early baptismal ceremonies. The baptismal candidate is said to put on a new fresh garment as they emerge from the water.

Then there is how Paul addresses the Colossians. He calls them chosen, holy, & beloved, which evokes how God's Community is referred to in the Old Testament, suggesting their inclusion.

He then gives his list of the virtues: Compassion; Kindness; Lowliness; Meekness; & Patience. It is from these that Christian character blossoms and grows! All of these virtues are social virtues, being how a Christian is supposed to act in relation others.

Then there is one for their church as a whole. A reminder to forgive one another. Paul wants to make sure that the community does not splinter or tear itself apart.

Love is the epitome of Christian virtue. It is what Jesus raised up as the most important thing of all! Paul sees it tying everything about the Christian character neatly together!

The Peace of Christ in our hearts is an inward serenity that Christ bestows on us. Paul is calling for a universal harmony and reminding us to be thankful!

The Word of Christ is then to be expressed in spiritual activities. And the use of three words referring to songs indicate the musical richness of the early church services, and this was also a marked difference between the church and other religions' worship services.

Paul ends with a summation about Christian Life, that the whole duty of a Christian is to follow the injunction to do all in the name of Jesus. That all Christian activity should be undertaken in prayer, invoking His presence and aid, in all thankfulness toward God, and under His authority, which means that we cannot do anything that is contrary to His spirit.

Paul is trying to get the Colossians to adjust their behavior and be better people. Kind of like what we try to do every January with New Year's resolutions. I usually have several, one concerning my health, and then others about traits or habits that I have felt need adjusting or pruning. Things we all probably do!

Jonathan Edwards made a list of resolutions for his own use, a list of 70 of them, that he would read every week. This was not something that he had published, but something that was extracted from his diary, his personal use writings. It gives great insight into the man and his thoughts, but it is very much like how Paul frequently is, trying to advocate better behavior, with full knowledge of its difficulties in doing so.

I emailed everyone on the church email list a copy of his Resolutions, and I have selected a few, using a list that modernized his language, to offer up for the meditations of our hearts in the coming Year.

1. Resolved: I will DO whatever I think will be most to God's glory; and my own good, profit and pleasure, for as long as I live. I will do all these things without any consideration of the time they take. Resolved: to do whatever I understand to be my duty and will provide the most good and benefit to humankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I encounter, and no matter how many I experience or how severe they may be.

3. Resolved: If ever – really, whenever – I fail & fall and/or grow weary & dull; whenever I begin to neglect the keeping of any part of these Resolutions; I will repent of everything I can remember that I have violated or neglected, ...as soon as I come to my senses again.

5. Resolved: Never lose one moment of time; but seize the time to use it in the most profitable way I possibly can.

6. Resolved: To live with all my might, ...while I do live.

7. Resolved: Never to do anything which I would be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

13. Resolved: To be endeavoring to discover worthy objects of charity and liberality.

14. Resolved: Never to do anything out of revenge.

15. Resolved: Never to suffer the least emotions of anger about irrational beings.

24. Resolved: Whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, I will trace it back till I come to the original cause; and then I will carefully endeavor BOTH 1) to do so no more AND 2) to fight and pray with all my might against the source of the original impulse.

54. Resolved: Whenever I hear anything spoken in a conversation of any person, if I think what is said of that person would be praiseworthy in me, I will endeavor to imitate it.

56. Resolved: Never to give up, nor even slacken up, in my fight with my own corruptions, no matter how successful or unsuccessful I may be.

58. Resolved: Not only to refrain from an air of dislike, fretfulness, and anger in conversations, but also to exhibit an air of love, cheerfulness and graciousness.

Many of these should be recognizable as similar to the teachings we find in the Bible, and there is also the sense of the realistic. Edwards knew he was not going to be able to do all of this, he knew he was going to falter. He accepted this, but with the understanding that once it is recognized, he would address it and keep trying. The weekly review of all the Resolutions probably helped him a lot. One of my resolutions this year is to do the same with this list. And now, as we go into the New Year, I hope that you have worthwhile self-examinations and then set yourselves practical yet challenging resolutions.

Pastoral Prayer

[PAUSE]

O God, You have blessed creation with a great variety of gifts and gathered all people into one family, so that in sharing, we might strengthen and be strengthened by one another. We gather into our hearts and minds the universe entrusted to us, remembering its needs before God and this company.

We pray for everyone who needs you. We pray for all who are sick and are suffering are healed; and that you guide the hands of their caregivers. We pray for all who are alone, that we can bring them company. We pray for all who are in distress, that we can bring them comfort. We pray for the forgiveness of sins, and we thank you for your understanding. We pray for peace throughout your creation.

We especially pray for:

Grant that these prayers, O God, may be enfolded by our commitment not only to pray them, but to live them in your Son's name. Amen.

Psalm 147:12-20

147:12 Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!

47:13 For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you.

147:14 He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat.

147:15 He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.

147:16 He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes.

147:17 He hurls down hail like crumbs-- who can stand before his cold?

147:18 He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.

147:19 He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel.

147:20 He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances. Praise the LORD!

Colossians 3:12-17

3:12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

3:13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

3:14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

3:15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

3:17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.