

A NEW MAN FOR THE NEW YEAR

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As I write, the New Year is in the midst of its fourth day. The perennial diet has begun. As a conservative I am obligated to uphold constancy, so, as usual, I have already cheated on the perennial diet. I'll be in a battle with weight the rest of my days...and I don't suppose that I'm alone.

Losing weight is the number one New Year's Resolution. The people working on that problem are trying to improve their health and in some way make themselves better. I myself am simply trying to avoid buying new pants. But most would agree that self-improvement is a good thing. As a matter of fact, the improvability of the human condition is a fundamental characteristic of western civilization. Though the improvement of our physical conditions is good, the Bible teaches that spiritual condition is best.

This truth comes from Colossians chapter three. The chapter begins with a masterful reflection of the concept of the new birth (John 3). Paul tells us that the old man of sin is dead and that we ought to mortify the characteristics that belong to that old life. This, he says, we can do by setting "*...our affections on things above*" (Colossians 3:2). Good thoughts precede good results

We are blessed in this instance because the apostle describes in the following verses what doing this requires. When he used the word "mortify", he is telling us symbolically to kill the desire or impulse we might have to do particular sins. These sins are listed: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, and lying. To improve one's spiritual condition, we must organize our mind and dedicate ourselves to the idea of refusing to accept these behaviors and even the thought of them in our lives. We must not do these things and in order to keep from doing them, we must not think about doing them.

These bad old things are to be "*put off*" and replaced by some things that are new and better. He says that we who are Christians "*...have put on the new man, which is renewed, in knowledge after the image of Him that created him*" (Colossians 3:10). Our newness begins at our baptism, but this newness needs the renewal (reinforcement) that results from knowing more of Christ and the way that He wants us to live. Thus, the process is continual and ongoing.

Paul then lists characteristics of this new man, this continually improving person that we are to be. *“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering: Forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any men have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness”* (Colossians 3:12-14). These are behaviors that we can, by the force of our minds, make ourselves adopt. God helps us in this by placing before us in His Word the standard and the motivation for making ourselves be this new man (see John 12:48). It is indeed up to us to make ourselves new men and women. Since we know that God will never test us above our abilities (1 Corinthians 10:13), we know that we can do it.

God has given us a new year. Perhaps we can make some physical improvements in ourselves like losing a few pounds and exercising a little more regularly. But let's be sure to take this opportunity to determine to improve our spiritual condition. God has blessed us with the ability to do so and will bless us when we do so. *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him”* (Colossians 3:17).