

A New Attitude for A New Year

Romans 5:1

Slide 1

Charles Swindoll once said, *“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude is more important to me than facts, than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do, than appearances, than giftedness or skill.*

It will make or break a company... a church... a home. But the remarkable thing is... we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we'll embrace for that day.

We can't change our past. We can't change the unpredictable. The only thing we can do is play on the one thing we have, and that's our attitude. I'm convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. We are in charge of our attitudes.”

Swindoll is right. It's not what happens to us that's important, it's how we respond to what happens to us. It's not what life brings, but what we bring to life! That's what matters.

I've known people who were exceedingly intelligent and gifted, who rarely contributed anything to the world.

And I've known people who were very average in intelligence and ability who were great successes.

As we face 2021, we don't know what this new year will bring, but how we face this new year is crucial.

Slide 2

This morning I want to talk about attitudes. There are several that I feel are important. The first is: Be authentic.

In other words, be real. Be yourself. Authenticity is an attitude of honesty and humility. So, don't try to be someone you're not.

It's hard to hide secret parts of your life. The bigger the secret, the harder it is to hide. The harder it is to hide, the more dysfunctional your life becomes. That's why it takes courage to be authentic.

In his discourse on love in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul writes in verse 12, *"For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."*

I love that. It gives us such great freedom to be ourselves.

So, what do we see? Well, in God's kingdom we see that we're fully known by God and others, and fully loved by God and others. This is what it means to live in Christian community — to be the church.

When someone opens up about a struggle in their lives, don't react with shock and shame. Be honored that someone has trusted you at a very deep level, so be an encourager and a listener.

As we begin to know them at a deeper level, we'll grow to love them at a deeper level. A relationship will develop that wasn't possible before.

That's one of the reasons why we come together... to encourage and strengthen each other; to let people know that they're not alone.

We're a family. We're to support each other.

Slide 3

A second attitude that helps us to be healthier is to be of good cheer.

Now, you can't be of good cheer if you're constantly thinking about how bad and terrible the world is. If you're focused on the end of the world, you can't enjoy the present moment.

How can we ever convince the world that we have good news if all we talk about is bad news?

And we don't just have good news, we have the best news the world has ever heard — news of which the world is in desperate need.

If you're angry at the world, you can't be at peace in the world. If you're afraid of the world, you can't minister to the world. You have to love the world as God loves the world.

It was Jesus who said in John 16:33, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

There's a book entitled *The Last Christian Generation*, in which the author says, *"If trends continue, the next generation of the Church will not even be rightfully called Christian."*

Did I miss something? When did this generation become Christian?

The author's discouraged about the lack of knowledge people have about Christian ideas and worldview. I understand that, but since when did the kingdom of God depend on what we're doing?

Have we forgotten about the power of the Holy Spirit? We've always lived in a pagan culture.

My hope isn't in this generation, or the next, becoming a Christian generation, but in the kingdom of God, as it continues to move regardless of how things may appear or what people do.

So, tell me... do you believe good or evil is winning today? If you believe evil is winning, then you're saying that evil is stronger than good; that the devil is more powerful than God.

Jesus has overcome the world. It's not that He'll overcome the world when He returns. No! That'll just be the evidence of what has been true all along.

Jesus brought the kingdom of God into the world, and it's been advancing ever since. Like yeast in dough, it does its work secretly. It's like a seed planted in the ground which grows unseen.

It's like God appearing to Elijah, not in the earthquake, wind, or fire, but in a gentle whisper.

Elijah stood against the wind and survived the fire, but the Word of God, spoken in a whisper, brought him to his knees.

You can't stop the kingdom of God any more than you can stop the tide or the rising of the sun. If you can hold back the coming of this new year, then you can hold back the kingdom of God.

As Christians, we're full of anticipation and excitement about what God's doing.

Jurgen Moltmann says, *"Expectation makes life good, for in expectation we can accept our whole present and find joy not only in its joy but also in its sorrow, happiness not only in its happiness but also in its pain."*

Thus hope goes on its way through the midst of happiness and pain, because in the promises of God it can see a future also for the transient, the dying and the dead. That is why it can be said that living without hope is like no longer living. Hell is hopelessness, and it's not for nothing that at the entrance to Dante's hell there stand the words: 'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.'"

Christians are people of hope. For us, sorrow is always a temporary emotion, and joy is the norm. But why do we think like that?

Well, the reason is that we know that life overcomes death; love is stronger than hate; light overcomes darkness; good will ultimately triumph and Jesus reigns.

In *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring*, there's a scene where Frodo is discouraged because of all the adversity he was going through.

As they sat, deep in the Mines of Moria, Frodo says to Gandalf, *"I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened."*

Gandalf says to him: *"So do all who live to see such times. But that's not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that's given to us. There are other forces at work than the will of evil."*

I believe Frodo's attitude changed because he realized that God's hand was at work in his life, and that even the difficult circumstances could not deter God's plan. To realize that is to experience joy.

Proverbs 17:22a says, *"A cheerful heart is good medicine."* In fact, a positive attitude and cheerful spirit is better than any medication you can take.

Slide 4

A third key attitude that helps us to be healthier is to be aware of God.

As I was driving around one day, I saw a sign in a yard that said, “*Jesus is coming!*” I couldn’t help but smile as I thought, “*He’s already here.*”

Sometimes we’re so focused on the second coming that we forget that He’s already come. He may not be living here the way He did in the time of the New Testament, but He’s most certainly here.

He has established His kingdom and has defeated sin, hell and death. He lives in the world He created.

Brennan Manning says, “*I believe that the real difference in the American church is not between conservatives and liberals, fundamentalists and charismatics, nor between Republicans and Democrats. The real difference is between the aware and the unaware.*”

When somebody is aware of the love — the same love that the Father has for Jesus — that person is just naturally grateful. Cries of thankfulness become the dominant characteristic of the interior life, and the byproduct of gratitude is joy. We’re not joyful and then become grateful — we’re grateful, and that makes us joyful.”

When you’re a grateful person you possess joy, even when you may possess little else.

What if you lived as though nothing could happen to you that God could not take care of? What if you lived as though you already had one foot in heaven, and that heaven was, in fact, all around you?

What if you saw the glory of God everywhere, and the image of God in every person? What if the very sight of a tree or cloud inspired you to worship, and you lived life in deep gratitude and thanksgiving?

How different your life would be? A new awareness and attitude could change your life.

Slide 5

Conclusion

It was 1741, and an old man was wandering the streets of London. His name was George Frederick Handel.

At this point, he was angry at life. His mind kept going back to the time when he was famous and had the applause of royalty and the elite of London.

But now his mind was full of despair and hopelessness about the future, for the applause was gone.

Others were now in the spotlight and envy began to possess him. Added to that, a cerebral hemorrhage paralyzed his right side.

He could no longer write, and doctors gave little hope for recovery. The old composer traveled to France and began to soak in the baths which were said to have healing effects.

The hot mineral baths seemed to help, and his health began to improve.

Eventually, he was able to write once more, and his success returned. But then he faced another reversal. Queen Caroline, who had been his staunch supporter, died.

England found itself on hard economic times. Heating large auditoriums for concerts was no longer permitted. His performances were canceled, and he began to wonder where God was.

Then one night, as he returned from his walk, Charles Jennens was waiting at his home.

Jennens explained that he had just finished writing a text for a musical that covered both the Old and New Testaments, and believed that Handel was the man to set it to music.

Handel was indifferent as he began to read the words which Jennens had put together.

But then his eyes fell on such words as *'He was despised, rejected of men... He looked for someone to have pity on Him, but there was no man; neither found He any to comfort Him.'*

His eyes raced ahead to the words: *'He trusted in God... God did not leave His soul in hell... He will give you rest.'* And finally his eyes stopped on the words: *'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'*

He became aware of the presence of God. He was aware in a new and profound way, and as he picked up his pen the Spirit of God was moving.

Music seemed to flow through him. He finished the first part in only seven days. The second section was completed in six days.

When the classical work was first performed in London, and the *'Hallelujah Chorus'* was sung by the choir, King George II was so moved that he stood to his feet.

To this day, people still rise to their feet as the great chorus is sung in praise to God.

In reflecting on Handel's Messiah, Joseph E. McCabe wrote: *"Never again are we to look at the stars, as we did when we were children, and wonder how far it is to God."*

A God who created, and withdrew, could be mighty, but he could not be love. Who could love a God so far away, when suffering is our lot? Our God is closer than our problems, for they are out there to be faced; He is here, beside us, Emmanuel.”

That’s the kind of attitude I’m talking about as we face this new year.