

A New Attitude for A New Year

Romans 5:1-5

Slide 1

Charles Swindoll once said, *“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life.*

Attitude is more important 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, and a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day.

We cannot change our past. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one thing we have, and that is our attitude.

I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to us and 90% how we react to it. We are in charge of our attitudes.”

Swindoll was 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 matters.

I've known people who've come from good homes, had many advantages in life, and never rose above mediocrity.

On the other hand, I've known people who've come from poverty and abuse who've accomplished great things.

I've known people who were exceedingly intelligent and gifted, who rarely contributed anything to the world, and I've known people who were average in intelligence and ability yet were great successes.

Some were willing to believe and work hard in spite of great disadvantages, while others gave up before they started.

Some rested on their laurels, while others had a dream. Some complained about what was wrong, and others put forth the effort to make things right.

Some had faith in God, and others had faith in nothing. Some lived in cynicism and despair, while others in lesser circumstances lived in faith and hope.

Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans,

Romans 5:1-5, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

Slide 2

As we enter this New Year, I think there are some key areas of our attitude in life that are important. The first is this: Be authentic. In other words, be real. Be yourself.

Authenticity is an attitude of honesty and humility. Don't try to be someone you're not. Don't wear a mask around others, be the same person in public and private.

One of the disappointing things about some of our national religious leaders this past year was that they were living two different lives.

They weren't authentic. Their public persona was vastly different from their personal life.

It would've been far better for them to talk openly about their struggles, and admit their weaknesses, rather than to pretend everything was great.

Far better for us to know of their struggles, so they could get help and we could pray for them, rather than have them pretend they had it all together, when they were actually falling apart.

It's hard to hide secret parts of our life, and the bigger the secret is the harder it is to hide. The harder it is to hide, the more dysfunctional your life becomes.

It takes courage to be authentic. It doesn't take any courage to wear a mask. One of the scriptures I like is about what it will be like when the kingdom of heaven arrives in its fullness.

1 Corinthians 13:12, *"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."*

It gives us great freedom to be ourselves. In God's kingdom we're fully known and loved by God and others. This is the model for what it means to live in a Christian community — to be the church.

When someone opens up about a struggle in their lives, we shouldn't react with shock and shame.

We should be honored that someone has trusted us at a very deep level. We should seek to 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 kind of relationship develops that wasn't possible before.

One of the things that's been a blessing for me is when new people come into our church and remark how "real" and friendly the people of our church are.

When people are actually open and honest about their struggles and failures, their doubts and fears, they don't have to pretend they have it all together.

That's why we come together, to encourage and strengthen each other; to let people know that they're not alone. We're a family and we support each other.

Slide 3

A second key attitude that helps us to be more healthy is to be of good cheer. 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?

Remember, we don't just have good news, we have the best news the world has ever heard — news about which the world is desperately in 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 must 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 written by a popular Christian author entitled, *The Last Christian Generation*. In the book he 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 in people 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 continuing to move on regardless of how things may appear or what people do.

God's going to do what He's going to do, regardless.

Do you believe good, or evil is winning the day? 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 Christ has overcome the world. It isn't that He will overcome the world when He returns. That will just be the evidence of what has been true all along.

Jesus brought the kingdom of God into the world, and it has been advancing ever since. It's like leaven in the dough which does its work secretly.

It's like the 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 summer, then you can hold back the kingdom of God.

That's why, as Christians, we're to be 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 is 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 only a temporary emotion, joy is the norm.

The reason we know this is that we recognize that life overcomes death. Love is stronger than hate, light overcomes darkness, good will ultimately triumph and Jesus reigns. Jesus came to have His joy live in us.

John 15:11, *"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."* Proverbs 17:22, *"A cheerful heart is good medicine."*

A positive attitude and cheerful spirit is better than any medication you can take.

Slide 4

Conclusion

Finally, a key attitude that helps us to be more healthy is to be aware of God.

While driving on vacation one time, I saw a sign that said, *“Jesus is coming!”*

Sort of like those old Burma Shave signs that littered the highways in my youth. Typically, there were six signs erected, each of the first five containing a line of verse and the sixth displaying the brand name.

Well, when I saw that sign, I smiled and thought, *“I have better news than that. He’s already here.”*

Sometimes we’re so focused on the second coming that we forget that He’s already come. He hasn’t abandoned the world.

Jesus may not be living here the way He did in the time of the New Testament, but He’s most certainly here.

Jesus hasn’t gone away. He has established His kingdom and defeated sin, hell and death. He lives in the world He created.

Brennan Manning said, *“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 that love — the same love that the Father has for Jesus — that person is just spontaneously 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 every moment as though God was all around you? What if you lived as though nothing could happen to you that God couldn't 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 really lived as though your sins and failures were gone in the mind of God.

What if you lived as though the power of the Holy Spirit lived in you, and you were walking around in a world created by God, loved by Him and blessed by His presence?

What if you lived believing that evil didn't stand a chance, and that it's only a matter of time until it's gone altogether?

What if you lived as though every person around you was a result of God's will and creation, and that they were made in the likeness of God?

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 would your life be?

A new awareness and attitude could literally change your life. That's the kind of attitude I'm talking about.