

## Happy New Year: God's Yearly Plan (Go To Meeting) Russell Kemp—April 12, 2024

The title actually came about because I received a couple e-mails from some of the brethren wishing me a Happy New Year.

We all know that the 9<sup>th</sup> of April was the first day of God's calendar, the Calculated Hebrew Calendar. What a stark contrast with what the rest of the world celebrates for New Year's.

So, I thought I would take a look at that and go through that a little bit today. Most people in the world do celebrate New Year's beginning on January 1<sup>st</sup> and most probably spent New Year's Eve partying and celebrating until the wee hours of the morning and then waking up with a severe headache and many regrets.

Most will awake to the same old burdens that they had the day before, nothing is going to be different! I can speak to some of these issues because I've been there and I've done that, and I've got the t-shirt. Let's be clear about one thing; there is no magic hour at midnight that suddenly ushers in utopia. That just doesn't happen!

However, we see the world a lot differently as we begin another year of God's Holy Day calendar that unfolds **God's Plan** for humanity in clarity and in detail.

Now today we're keeping God's commandment, the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, as God instructed Moses:

Leviticus 23:1: And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, "*Concerning the appointed Feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be Holy convocations, even these are **My appointed Feasts.** Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, a Holy convocation. You shall not do any work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings*"' (vs 1-3).

And notice the two things we're told here. It is not only to observe the seventh-day Sabbath, but we're to work on the other six days.

Then we're looking at April 22<sup>nd</sup>. We will attend the Passover ceremony, once again taking the body and the blood of Christ in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice and ***a recommitment!*** This is what we're getting ready to do of our calling for the year ahead. Israel was instructed to keep the Passover in Lev. 23:5. And we're told in 1-Peter 1:18-19 that Christ became the sacrificial lamb of the Passover.

1-Peter 1:18: "Knowing that you were not

redeemed by corruptible things, by silver or gold, from your futile way of living, inherited *by tradition* from *your* forefathers; but by *the* precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (vs 18-19)

Christ gave His life so that our death penalty—yours and mine—would be removed and the sins of the world would get forgiven, the entire world.

Following that—and again, this is just a brief overview—we observe the seven days of Unleavened Bread ***representing our commitment to putting sin out of our lives!***

Leviticus 23:6: "And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD. You must eat unleavened bread seven days.

We are again told to keep the days of Unleavened Bread because of Christ's sacrifice in:

1-Corinthians 5:7: "Therefore, purge out the old leaven, so that you may become a new lump, *even* as you are unleavened.... [Why?] ...For Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. For this reason, let us keep the Feast, not with old leaven, nor with *the* leaven of malice and wickedness, but with *the* unleavened *bread* of Sincerity and Truth" (vs 7-8).

Now these are the things that just lead up to what we're adding into this new year. Then on June 16, we will assemble for the Feast of the Firstfruits, or Pentecost, and again Israel was instructed to ***keep the Feast of the Harvest of the Firstfruits of your labor*** (Exo. 23:16)

Acts 2—we see that the Church was established by giving of God's Holy Spirit to Christians on Pentecost, but we know there's a lot more to Pentecost. I'm not going to go into all the details there.

James 1:18: "According to His own will, He begat us by *the* Word of Truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all His created beings."

We are the firstfruits! Now following that, and a lot of this is an overview—and this is all part of this new year—this whole year that we're going into.

We will continue with the fall festivals of which are found in Lev. 23. First, the Feast of Trumpets, picturing the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Next is the Day of Atonement, which teaches us that Christ gave His life as an atonement for our sins and giving us access to God the Father through Jesus Christ as our High Priest.

Hebrews 4:14: "Having, therefore, a great High Priest, *Who* has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, we should hold fast the confession *of our faith*. For we do not have a High Priest... [He is our High Priest] ...Who cannot empathize with our weaknesses, but *One Who* was tempted in all things according to *the likeness of our own temptations*... [He had to suffer and deal with the same things that we're tempted on] ... yet, *He was* without sin. Therefore, we should come with boldness to the Throne of Grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (vs 14-16).

Of course, following Atonement is the Feast of Tabernacles where Christ will return as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is a summary of where we're going this year to set up His Kingdom on earth, assisted by you and me and the resurrected saints. At this time, Satan will have been bound for a thousand years, finally allowing peace on earth.

Many Scriptures relate to this event, but it does tell us in:

Revelation 19:11: "And I saw heaven open; and behold, a white horse; and He Who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He does judge and make war."

Verse 14: "And the armies in heaven were following Him on white horses; *and* they were clothed in fine linen, white and pure."

Again, kind of a summary. The final event on God's great calendar is the Last Great Day completing God's Plan for humanity, where all human beings who have died in the past will be given an opportunity for salvation.

Revelation 20:11: "Then I saw a great white Throne and the One Who was sitting on it, from Whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God; and *the* books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged out of the things written in the books, **according to their works**" (vs 11-12). *An important thing to take a look at as we go through this year.*

Verse 13: "And the sea gave up the dead *that were* in it, and death and *the* grave gave up the dead *that were* in them; and they were judged individually, according to their works."

This, ladies and gentlemen, in a nutshell, is ***God's Plan for humanity!*** It's all spelled out for us on a yearly plan.

- Does this not represent a happy new year?
- Would you trade it for all the traditions and celebrations that the world does on New Year's Eve and on January 1<sup>st</sup>?

As we begin today, let's take a look at what makes this a happy new year. We live in a very difficult world, rapidly changing. I'm not going to make a jest of the situation of the world we look at today and things going on, but we need to take a look at the positive side here.

First, I remember many times when I just wanted to have the world stop and let me get off. Let me get off and have a new start in life. I'm sure many have dreamed of that same opportunity of starting over again.

You know, we've been given that opportunity of a new birth and a new beginning. We've been given that opportunity.

John 3:1: "Now, there was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus by name, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher *Who* has come from God; because no one is able to do the miracles that You are doing unless God is with him'"(vs 1-2). *Anyway it's pretty innocent!*

Verse 3: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone is born again...'" *That's an interesting statement when you're talking to somebody!*

"...he cannot see the Kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man who is old be born? Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone has been born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which has been born of the flesh is flesh... [which all of us are today] ...and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit'" (vs 3-6).

Let me just interject here that to be born of water refers to being born in the flesh. ***But being born in the spirit refers to the resurrection from the dead to eternal life*** as a glorified being, not some emotional conversation as so many teach today.

Verse 7—*Jesus says*: 'Do not be amazed that I said to you, "It is necessary for you to be born again.'" ***We must be born again spiritually!***

*Paul tells us in 1-Corinthians 15:50*: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit *the Kingdom of God*..."

*You and I are flesh and blood!* However, **IF**:

- we have repented
- we have been baptized
- we've received the Spirit of God through the laying on of hands

***we have been given the opportunity to be those firstfruits we just talked about as God's children in the Kingdom of God!***

Not in this flesh where we currently abide, it will not happen while we're in the flesh! But in a new glorified spiritual body given by God.

John 1:12: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave authority to become *the* children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name; who were not begotten by bloodlines... [in other words, a physical body] ...nor by *the* will of *the* flesh, nor by *the* will of man, **but by the will of God**" (vs 12-13).

I ask you, should this not give you cause for a happy new year? *What we've been offered, with the chances that we have,*

- *we've been given a new beginning*
- *we've been given a new life*
- *we've been given hope through Christ*

When I look at this, prior to our conversion we were slaves to sin as a way of life. ***Don't kid yourself, we were slaves to sin!*** We now have the opportunity of walking in a newness of life.

Romans 6:1: "What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound?... [notice that Paul almost shouts this when he said] ...MAY IT NEVER BE! We who died to sin, how shall we live any longer therein? Or are you ignorant that we, as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through the baptism into the death; so that, just as Christ was raised from *the* dead by the glory of the Father... [Is this not good news?]: **...in the same way, we also should walk in newness of life**" (vs 1-4).

Verse 6: "Knowing this, that our old man was co-crucified with *Him* in order that the body of sin might be destroyed, **so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin**"

Is that not good news? Brethren, what a wonderful opportunity we have been given by the Spirit of God to put away that old man and overcome the lusts of the flesh. We're not perfect, we're never going to be perfect in the flesh. We've been given that opportunity with God's Holy Spirit.

I won't turn there, but we know what the things of the flesh are in Gal. 5, where it clearly

delineates the works of the flesh, where we once walked in. Just as a brief summary: such as adultery, we see a lot of this in the world today. By the way, a lot of these things we're talking about fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strife, jealousies, envy, murder, drunkenness. ***This is the way of the world!***

Let's see at how we should be walking, should be walking in the newness of life

Ephesians 5:1: "Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children; and walk in love, even as Christ also loved us, and gave Himself for us *as* an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor" (vs 1-2).

Verse 8: "For you were once darkness; but now *you are* light in *the* Lord.... [then we're told to] ...Walk as children of Light, (because the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness and righteousness and Truth); proving what is well pleasing to the Lord" (vs 8-10).

Verse 14: "Therefore, He says, '*You* who are sleeping... [this is so important here] **...wake up, and arise from the dead!**... [we were all once dead] ... And Christ shall shine upon you.' So then, take heed that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as those who are wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (vs 14-16).

The days are evil, the difference between the way of the world walks and our new calling is stark; it is so stark and different.

Romans 13:11: "Now *consider* this, knowing the time, that *it is* already *the* hour that we should be roused out of sleep; because our salvation *is* nearer now than when we first believed."

I believe that's very true. Notice that once again, we're to arise out of this sleep that we're in.

Verse 12: "The night is almost over and the day is drawing near; therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk decently, as in *the* day: not in reveling and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and emulation. But *let us* put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not make any allowance for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (vs 12-14).

Now see, it's a two-way thing with us here. We've been given a new life. We start a new year *every year*, **but there are requirements: Let us be happy and rejoice knowing the Truth of God** and given the opportunity to start over, to live a new life, to be part of those first roots of God's Kingdom and having the joy of being part of God's Family.

God's Plan is not complete and we have not received what God has planned for us in the future. Not yet, but let's be like Paul as he tells us in:

Philippians 3:13: "Brethren, I do not count myself as having attained; but *this* one thing *I do*—forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to the things that are ahead, I press toward *the* goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (vs 13-14).

That's our goal! So brethren, ***let us count the blessings we've received from God as we begin this new year!***

Many people use New Year's Eve to make resolutions to change things in their life. I'll be honest with you, I've done that in the past and I can probably guess some of you have done the same thing. I'll just hit a few of them there.

- I'm going to give up smoking

I was, believe it or not, as a young man I was a very happy smoker. *I gave it up!* Whether I did it through a resolution or the fact that I knew it wasn't good for me, I'm not sure.

- I'm going to lose some weight

I can tell you when I retired from the military, I did not need to lose any weight. I could probably lose a couple pounds now.

- I'm going to get more exercise
- I'm going to get out of debt

I kind of laugh at that because my wife and I made a conscious decision back in the early 1990s. that we were not going to use debt anymore. We spent about two years working at it and paid off all our debt and we've never borrowed money since, a long time ago.

- I'm going to be a better husband

My wife might like that; I'm not sure what she would say. OR:

- I'm going to be a better wife
- I'm going to watch less TV

*Look at all the garbage that's on TV today.*

- I want to spend more time with my children

I can't do that much anymore. I don't have children at home. I don't have grandchildren at home. I have great-grandchildren that I go visit.

We could go on and on and on! Some people probably do carry out and live through some of those resolutions. But more likely, most stop after trying after a month or two. I probably did the same with some of these resolutions that I did way back in my past.

I don't have a problem with resolutions. A resolution is simply the act of being resolute, which is *having or showing a fixed firm purpose or determined resolve, unwavering resolve to do something!*

***We all need to be resolved in our calling this year!*** We know what our calling is. This is one reason why prior to Passover we examine ourselves to see what we need to do. You know resolutions are just a form of goal setting. That's how they are! They're just a form of goal setting, and it's always good to set goals.

I am not knocking anybody setting goals. If we set goals and write them down, we're more likely to achieve them than just saying I'm going to do it.

I had a habit for many, many years of sitting down at night and writing out what I was going to accomplish tomorrow, and what I was going to accomplish next week. I even had a five-year plan.

I lived through all that kind of stuff, and hopefully we'll accomplish them if I don't forget them; that's why I write them down.

I would like to suggest a few resolutions we should consider for our new year, and I want everyone to understand that Russell Kemp is the 'I' in these resolutions. I would hope that some of you would look at it this way, as well.

### **1) I want to ensure that this year my tithing and my offerings are in keeping with God's will**

I bring this up because when I look back I realize I wouldn't be here today in God's Church if it weren't for the tithes and the offerings of others.

Someone, through tithes and offerings to the Worldwide Church of God—many, many, many years ago—provided me booklets on God's Truth. I'm sure many of you could say the same.

I had the *Good News* magazine, and the *Plain Truth* magazine. Just recently my wife found two full boxes full of those things. And she said, 'Russ, can we finally start getting rid of some of these things?' I took and gave them to somebody I knew in another Church of God and told them, 'Help yourselves. You want any of that stuff, read them.'

I also had my old Bible Correspondence Course completed, done, threw it away. But you know, the radio broadcast, the TV broadcast, we had ministers to teach us and guide me through the years. We had buildings where we could fellowship with brethren. These things all cost money. Now let's look at a few Biblical examples of resolutions on tithing.

Gen. 28—This is the time when Jacob was actually fleeing from his brother Esau, and Esau wanted to kill Jacob because he was defrauded out of his blessings.

Genesis 28:22—*Jacob says*: “And this stone, which I have set for a pillar shall be God’s house. And of all that You shall give me, I will surely give the tenth to You.”

Jacob didn’t have much to offer at that time, quite frankly, **but he made a resolution to tithe all that he was given by God!**

We all know that Abraham tithed well prior to Jacob, which we can see in:

Genesis 14:20: “And blessed *be* the Most High God, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ And he gave Him tithes of all.”

Tithing is an important part of what we do. We’ve all been blessed with the Truth of God, there’s no doubt about that, and His Word. **But God also promises to bless us in abundance if we faithfully tithe!**

I think most of us are familiar with this, but God tells us:

Malachi 3:10: “‘Bring all the tithes into the treasure house, so that there may be food in My house. And prove Me now with this,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘to see if I will not surely open the windows of heaven for you, and pour out a blessing for you, **until there is not enough room to receive it.**”

Now I can tell you that there have been times where my wife and were I dealing with stressful situations that God has blessed us. Do we want others to get the Word of God and come into the Church, whether it’s with all the Bibles that Fred’s been giving out, or so many other things.

- Do we take God in His word?
- Do you count your blessings?
- Were you born in the United States of America?

I’ve said this over and over and over again, my generation has been blessed tremendously, I think, of any generation in the history of the world. Unfortunately, I see it crumbling right now.

- Would you want to compare that to being born, say in Haiti?
- Do you appreciate your home, all the luxuries that you may have?

I know some of us struggle, some do not. But anyway, all the luxuries that accompany the standard of living that we’ve had in this country. I

pray that we haven’t forgotten what God told the Laodiceans; we’re all familiar with this:

Revelation 3:17: “For you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy...’”

I’ve been there to a degree. I’m certainly not a Bill Gates or one of those, but I’ve done fairly well.

“...and have need of nothing, and you do not understand that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (v 17).

Brethren, we have been given a much greater gift than all the gold and the wealth of the world. **God has given us a Truth** that so few people in the world have. Furthermore, we know that our tithing is required for God’s work to continue. Fred does a wonderful job, by the way.

I mean, so many of the documents, the stuff he sends out is such a tremendous blessing to people that get to see it and read it. Paul gives us an example:

1-Corinthians 16:1—*Paul instructs the Corinthians*: “Now, concerning the collection that *is being made* for the saints: as I directed the churches in Galatia, so you also are to do. Every first *day* of the week, each one is to put aside *food* at home, storing up whatever he may be prospered in, so that there need not be any collections when I come” (vs 1-2).

I mean, it just this week, we have a responsibility to help others in the Church and to be able to spread the Word of God to the rest of the world. **We have been blessed with the Truth and the knowledge of God because of the tithes of others! No question.**

Let’s not neglect the work of God and faithfully tithe this year so that others will have the same opportunities that we have been blessed with. We’ve been truly blessed.

## 2) **I will be faithful in reading my Bible, in studying and in meditating on the Word of God this year**

Once again, I put Russ Kemp in the ‘I’ in this statement and I hope some of you would do the same thing.

I slip up! There are times I fall aside and I wake up and realize that! Like Paul says, ‘Wake up! You need to wake up!’

King David made his resolution to study and meditate on the Word of God. We find that in:

Psalms 119:15: “I will meditate upon Your precepts and have respect to Your ways. I will

delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your Word” (vs 15-16).

Brethren, the Bible is God's Instruction Book for mankind. There's no question of that. It tells us:

- how to live
- what our relationship should be with God
- what our relationship should be with each other
- what to do
- what not to do

*It reveals God's Plan for us*—which we basically went through at the beginning of this message—for us now and in the future.

Christ tells us in Matthew 4:4: “...‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of *the* mouth of God.””

If we neglect to study and meditate on the Word of God, how can we live by the Word of God? The hard drive when we look at a computer is the brain of a computer; *it's the brain!* It has to have stuff programmed into it, and as it's programmed, so it is!

Our brain is the hard drive of the human body. What we put into that hard drive is what is bound to come out of it.

Proverbs 23:7: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he...”

We're to become like God and develop the very character, which is our basic prime goal in life. We need to be filling our brain with the Word of God.

King David says, ‘I will delight myself in Your statutes.’ Do we have that attitude? *Studying our Bible should not be drudgery! It should be a delight!*

God loves us so much, He gave us His Word for our benefit! We need to know His Word when challenged by others. I've been challenged. I'm sure many of you have been challenged. We need to know God's Word.

How can we answer others if we don't know the Truth? And perhaps we should resolve to read the entire Bible through the year. I do that sometimes and I'm a little bit behind this year, to be honest with you. If we were to just read four chapters a day, we will get through the entire Bible in a year.

If we are to draw closer to God, *we must meditate and study on God's Word, the Bible! It's a must.*

### 3) I intend to clean up my life and ensure I stay unspotted from the world

Currently we should be examining ourselves prior to Passover. That's one of the things we're told to do every year. But what about the rest of the year? *Passover is only the beginning!*

- Do we let our guard down after Passover and stop growing and correcting the sins that we become aware of?

Now, I'm sorry, we're still going to indeed deal with sins from time to time.

- Do we let our guard down after Passover and stop growing?
- Do we continue to examine ourselves?

You know, and I've said this many, many times, that *this is Satan's world we live in!* And I certainly believe *that as we get closer to the end of this age, Satan will increase the intensity to deceive us and cause us to sin!* There is no question in my mind that that's coming.

- Do we take Satan seriously?
- Do we take him seriously?

or

- Is he just some red devil with horns and a tail?

Satan would like us to believe that he is just a joke. He doesn't want us to take him seriously.

*John tells us; 1-John 1:8: “If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the Truth is not in us.”*

1-Peter 5:8—*and Peter almost shouts this out: “**Be sober! Be vigilant!**... [as he expresses a strong emotion] ...**For your adversary the devil is prowling about as a roaring lion, seeking anyone he may devour.**”*

This is not a joke! This is true! *Don't fool yourselves into believing you can't be pulled into Satan's web of deception!* Don't think that you can't be. *We need to be sober! We need to be vigilant to ensure that we don't fall into that deception!*

- Do we take these words of Peter seriously?

or

- Does it just make a nice read?

In the book of Daniel, we're told that when Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, conquered Jerusalem and Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Daniel

along with others were brought to Babylon as captives. We know these stories.

There was a foreign power whose ways were sinful and significantly different than the way of the Jews. Daniel was selected among others to be trained by the king. Daniel was a young man; I don't know exactly, but the assumptions are maybe about somewhere around 15-years-old.

It would have been very easy for Daniel to just go along with the crowd and become part of that society. But Daniel made a resolution to not depart from what God would have him do.

Daniel 1:8: "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's food, nor with the wine, which he drank...."

Later we see the same attitude from Daniel when he was ordered not to pray to any other God other than King Darius for 30 days or be thrown into the lion's den (Dan. 6). We're all familiar with that.

We're told that King Darius placed Daniel in a very high position of authority over the members of the kingdom.

Daniel 6:2: "And over them *were* three presidents (Daniel was one of them)..."

Then we find the men that were placed under him making this statement:

Verse 5: "Then these men said, 'We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.'"

So, they plotted and King Darius put out the decree

Verse 7: "...that whoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, except from you, O king, he shall be thrown into the den of lions."

We know the outcome of all this. This would have been similar to Daniel being taken captive, for example in Saudi Arabia or someplace today where Christians are not allowed to pray even privately. What would you do in that situation? ***Daniel chose the way of God and not the way of the world!***

Verse 10: "And when he had learned that the document was signed, Daniel went to his house. And his windows were open in his upper room toward Jerusalem; and he kneeled on his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did before."

Now keep in mind, Daniel was a very young man, but he made a resolution to follow God and not man.

Let's not forget and let our guard down after Passover and after the days of Unleavened Bread and conform once again to this world. Let us do, as Peter said, ***to be sober and vigilant, continuing to examine ourselves throughout the New Year, throughout the whole year.***

4) **I intend to stay positive in this negative world**

Once again, I put Russell Kemp in this statement, as well. I have a hard time with this; I will be honest with you and tell you right up front.

Christ was talking with the apostles, He told them what they, as well as us today, would be facing:

John 16:33: "These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. **In the world you shall have tribulation....**" *That's a promise!*

No doubt in today's world, as well, we will face tribulation. However, then Christ tells them,

"...But be courageous! I have overcome the world" (v 33).

I will tell you, brethren, I have a bad habit of staying up on current events. I don't think I've watched anything on TV anymore except for news, and when I'm driving, what do I listen to? *Talk radio!* And most of what I hear, I hate to tell you, is negative.

When I watch TV, like I said, most of it's the news. Do we usually get a lot of good news? What I read, what I used to read—even when I was reading a lot out of a newspaper—I used to read the Wall Street Journal. I can't get it anymore where I live, but other current events and magazines along with nonfiction books. That's me; my wife reads novels. I hope she gets good enjoyment out of them.

- Do you realize how negative the news is?
- What does it usually contain?
  - ✓ violence
  - ✓ war; wars everywhere
  - ✓ crime
  - ✓ abortions
  - ✓ home breakups
  - ✓ people being hospitalized

*including, by the way, brethren in our Church that we're asked to pray for*

- deaths
- people being in prison

Occasionally, we might get some good news, but most is overwhelmingly negative.

When you get a steady diet of this, it's very hard to stay positive. Add to that news on the Internet, TV, movies, computer games, which I've never played any of those. I'm sure some of my kids do. It seems today we always have the radio or TV on. I don't; very little. I go to my kids' house sometime and the TV is on all the time.

- Are we on the computer all day?
- Are we just saturated with negative information?

Anytime an earthquake happens, we have that news immediately! We get violent storms, we get that immediately! If there's a fire somewhere, we get that immediately! If there's flooding, we're told instantly! In all these events, God did not intend for you and I to be negative. *We're to focus on positive!*

Philippians 4:7: "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever *things* are true, whatever *things* are honorable, whatever *things* are just, whatever *things* are pure, whatever *things* are lovely, whatever *things* are of good report; if *there be* any virtue and if *there be* any praise, think on these things" (vs 7-8).

We, at times, as Christians are negative and we complain, but this is not what we're to focus on. ***We need to focus on the love of God!*** God loves us in spite of the circumstances in the world. God's love is shown in His very creation. We may screw it up, but what a wonderful world that God has created for mankind.

God's love has revealed it to us in all the pages of His Bible. God clearly demonstrates His love to us with the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ for ***our*** inequities, not His. God demonstrates His love to us in answered prayer.

I can't speak for all of you, but God has blessed my wife and I with answered prayer, and I could go through some of them with you and there's no doubt that He's blessed us. We're very grateful, very thankful!

The downside of today's world is that we have instant communications. Any event that happens in the world is instantly broadcast on the news and we are bombarded with, constantly, negative messages. It begins to affect us both psychologically as well as physically. *It'll drive you down!*

Instead, we need to be focusing on our Bible study and our prayer. Do you ever forget to thank God every day for the blessings He's poured out on this nation and its people, including you and me? *I do sometimes!*

We can complain about all the bad things that happened in our life or we can count our blessings and be thankful to God. We can recognize the fact that this is not a perfect world we live in.

- there are no perfect people
  - ✓ we all have flaws
  - ✓ we all have faults
- there is no perfect Church
- there is no perfect pastor or minister

However, there are positive things that we can focus on.

- some people are true and honest and just
- some have good reputations and are spoken well of by others
- some do praiseworthy things

Look at all that Paul had to go through in life. When you read this and you think about Paul

2-Corinthians 11:24: "Five times from *the* Jews I received forty *stripes* less one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I spent in the deep. *I have been* in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from *my own* race, in perils from *the* Gentiles, in perils in *the* city, in perils in *the* desert, in perils on *the* sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (vs 25-27).

That's quite a life. Yet, he stayed positive. He still could see the good in people and he longed for the salvation. He counted all the negative things not worth the joy of Christ.

Philippians 1:3: "I thank my God on every remembrance of you, always making supplication with joy in my every prayer for you all" (vs 3-4).

What a wonderful positive attitude Paul maintained in a negative world! Perhaps a great way to begin developing positive attitudes would be to make a list of all the blessings and give thanks to God for them.

Our faith in Christ alone should help us sustain a positive attitude in this negative world.

5) **I, Russell Kemp, will increase my effort to serving God, my family, the Church, and my brethren whenever possible**

There's times I think: 'I'm getting old, maybe I don't want to do this.'

Christ came to serve and we should be serving! We need to be involved in the Church. We should volunteer in any capacity we can. I think

about this when I was doing the Feast over and over again in Destin, Florida.

Somebody needs to set up chairs, volunteer to do it. Offer to give opening and closing prayer. I used to have a struggle sometimes to get people to give opening and closing prayer. I definitely had a terrible time trying to get somebody to help me with the sound system and the video.

Of course, we know the Bible tells us that we are to visit the widows and those, who for a reason of health or other problems cannot attend the regular Sabbath services.

James 1:27: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and *the* Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

A lot of you people, and it's a good thing to do, you send cards and things to those who are in the need. If you have a talent and you can provide special music at the Feast, it's great. What if you know somebody that doesn't have a ride, don't know how to get, or can't get to a Church somewhere?

- Do you express appreciation for what your loved ones do for you?
- Do you hug your children?
- Do you tell them that you love them?

I had a little difficulty with this, and I'm sorry, I hope I don't go over too much here, but when I was a young man, my dad was not a hugger. He was a wonderful father. I'm telling you right now, I wouldn't trade him for anything. I wish he was still around.

But I will tell you, he was in that generation of men who were not huggers. My kids have forced me to learn to be a hugger. So, now I'm a hugger. If you have parents alive, do you call them? *I miss my parents!* Nevertheless, I can tell you that I get upset when I haven't heard from my children for a while. Stop griping and give compliments to your family.

Are you having family Bible study, Bible prayer? I hope so!

Paul gives us a pretty good example of what our attitude toward one another should be after baptism:

Colossians 3:12: "Put on then, as *the* elect of God, Holy and beloved, deep inner affections, kindness, humility, meekness *and* long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, **so also you should forgive**" (vs 12-13).

We've certainly been taught to pray like Christ, in what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, *to ask for forgiveness!* But we are also to forgive others.

Verse 14: "And above all these things *put on* love, which is *the* bond of perfection."

Christ says all the Law hangs on two commandments:

1. to love God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, all your being
2. to love one another

How important is it to put on love?

Verse 15: "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you were called into one body, and be thankful... [then we're told how to portray this love]: ...**Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly** in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (vs 15-16).

Then Paul gets really clear on what our relationship should be to our family:

Verse 17: "And *in* everything..."

- not just part time
- not just sometimes
- not just when we feel like it

"...—whatever you do in word or in deed—*do* all in *the* name of *the* Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and *the* Father by Him" (v 17).

Verse 18: "**Wives**, submit yourselves to your own husbands as *it* is fitting in *the* Lord."

You notice he didn't say *to submit to someone else's husband*, like so many believe today.

Verse 19: "**Husbands**, love *your* wives, and do not be bitter against them.

Verse 20: "**Children**, obey *your* parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord."

Verse 21: "**Fathers**, do not provoke your children, lest they be discouraged."

Verse 22: "**Servants**... [that actually could be our attitude toward whoever we work for] ...obey your fleshly masters in all things—not with eye service as pleasing men; but with singleness of heart, fearing God."

And here's the bottom line, here's the bottom line:

Verse 23: "**And whatever you do, do heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.**"

***What an inspiration! What an attitude!***

If this is not what we are doing, we need to pray for guidance in these matters and *be resolute!*

Like I said, in changing there are so many resolutions that we could and should make, but the bottom line boils down to ***continuing examining our self continuously throughout this year***, not just a one-shot at Passover.

When I started today, I wished you a 'happy new year.' I gave you a few reasons why this should be a happy new year. God has indeed blessed us with the knowledge of His Kingdom and the opportunity He has given us to be a member of His Family as the firstfruits of His Kingdom. ***What a blessing!*** God has put our past behind us and given us a new start.

***To be forgiven! What a blessing!*** He gives us His Holy Spirit every year as a reminder of His Plan for humanity. God offers us more love and joy than we could ever imagine!

We do have our part in God's Plan, and it should require us to set goals/resolutions, call them what you want. But goals are only a useful way ***IF*** we put them to practice in our life:

- praying appropriately
- studying the Word of God
- meditating throughout the year
- examining oneself and purging our sins
- managing a positive attitude
- serving God and others

***is only a small part of doing God's will!***

But if we set goals and are resolute—are resolute in following through with those goals—perhaps we might just be a little better Christian this year.

**Selah! Selah! Think on these things!**

Scriptural References:

- 1) Leviticus 23:1-3
- 2) 1-Peter 1:18-19
- 3) Leviticus 23:6
- 4) 1-Corinthians 5:7-8
- 5) James 1:18
- 6) Hebrews 4:14-16
- 7) Revelations 19:11, 14
- 8) Revelations 20:11-13
- 9) John 3:1-7
- 10) 1-Corinthians 15:50
- 11) John 1:12-13
- 12) Romans 6:1-4, 6
- 13) Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-10, 14-16

- 14) Romans 13:11-14
- 15) Philippians 3:13-14
- 16) Genesis 28:22
- 17) Genesis 14:20
- 18) Malachi 3:10
- 19) Revelation 3:17
- 20) 1-Corinthians 16:1-2
- 21) Psalm 119:15-16
- 22) Matthew 4:4
- 23) Proverbs 23:7
- 24) 1-John 1:8
- 25) 1-Peter 5:8
- 26) Daniel 1:8
- 27) Daniel 6:2, 5, 7, 10
- 28) John 16:33
- 29) Philippians 4:7-8
- 30) 2-Corinthians 11:24-27
- 31) Philippians 1:3-4
- 32) James 1:27
- 33) Colossians 3:12-23

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Leviticus 23:5
- Exodus 23:16
- Acts 2
- Galatians 5

RK:bo/po  
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