

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

323

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with "New Year's Day". If you look for it, there is always a spiritual dimension to everything and New Year's Day is no exception. God Himself ordained "seasons, days, and years". On the fourth day of creation God said: **"Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons, days and years" (Gen. 1:14)**. As we said, God ordained "seasons, days and years". The calendar is not irrelevant but plays an important role in society. For example, it enables men to select the best time to plant their crops and helps them to accurately predict the migration of animals and birds. For those depending upon hunting and harvesting the calendar is extremely important. As we have said, from the very beginning God created the clockwork of the heavens to "mark seasons, days, and years." Everything God creates has a purpose!

The Lord gave a new calendar to Moses as he was about to lead Israel out of Egyptian bondage. **"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt. 'This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.'" (Ex. 12:1,2)** This adds another dimension to the calendar. It provides a systematic and accurate way for the people of God to worship. God told Moses and Aaron "This month is for you the first month". On the 10th day of that month each household was to take a year old lamb without defect and shut it up. On the 14th day of the month that lamb was to be sacrificed. This became an annual event among the Hebrews and is known as the "Passover". Other special days are listed in Lev. 23: They include the Sabbath, the Passover, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles, Etc. Each religious festival began on a specific day of a specific month.

The Jews actually had two different calendars and thus two different new years. The "religious" new year began in the month of Abib (also called Nisan). It was on the 14th day of this month at even that the Passover Lamb was sacrificed. The "civil" new year began on the first day of Tishrei which was the 7th month of the Jewish religious year. The Bible calls this the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:23-25), but modern Jews call it "Rosh Hashanah" which literally means "head of the year".

The earliest known record of new year festivals dates back to Mesopotamia around 2,000 B.C. It was celebrated in the month of March. In Assyria their new year was celebrated in September. The Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Persians all began their new year on the autumnal equinox. The Greeks began their year in December at the winter solstice and the early Romans chose March 1st. The first time January 1st was celebrated as the new year was in Rome in 153 B.C.

Waverly Fitzgerald notes: *"While each culture's New Year celebration has its own flavor, there are certain common themes. The period leading up to New Year's Day is a time for setting things straight: a thorough housecleaning, paying off debts, returning borrowed objects, reflecting on one's shortcomings, mending quarrels, giving alms. In many cultures, people jump into the sea or a local body of water-literally washing the slate clean."*

The idea of starting over with a clean slate is especially relevant for Christians as this is the essence of conversion. This new life is beautifully symbolized by baptism. Paul wrote: **"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life"** (Rom. 6:4). In Christ

our sins are blotted out (Acts 3:19). In Christ we become a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). In Christ we are freely justified by His grace (Rom. 3:24). Being “justified” means it is “just as if I’d never sinned”.

Paul himself is an excellent example of this new life. He wrote to Timothy: **“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life”** (1 Tim. 1:15,16). The point is, if someone as bad as Paul can be saved, anybody can be saved!

Jesus frequently used earthly things to teach eternal truth. To a thirsty woman He said: **“Whoever drinks of the water that I give will never thirst”** (Jn. 4:14). As His disciples walked through a vineyard He said **“I am the true vine and my Father is the Gardener”** (Jn. 15:1). After feeding the multitudes He said: **“I am the bread of life”** (Jn. 6:35). When a young man asked Him to make his brother divide the inheritance, He said: **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed”** (Lk. 12:15). At the last supper He took bread and said: **“This is my body”** (Matt. 26:26). We should not be surprised, therefore, that the early church used bread and wine to remind them of the death of Christ (1 Cor. 11:23-34). The church specifically met on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). The first day of the week was the day of our Lord’s resurrection (Matt. 28:1). The church also began on the first day of the week which happened to be Pentecost (Lev. 23:16). It was also on the first day of the week that the church received offerings (1 Cor. 16:2).

The “first day of the week” and the “first day of the year” are eloquent reminders that no matter how bad we have been and how many mistakes we have made, God always provides a way for us to be forgiven and to start over with a clean slate.

HAPPY NEW YEAR,

Grandpa Boyce