

What's New?

By Jim Fowler

As the planet we reside on begins another annual trajectory around the sun, it provides an occasion for us to inquire, "What's new in our world or in our lives as we begin this New Year?" The perspective of some might be that they are "stuck in the monotonous rut" of the repetitious "same old, same old" routine. Others may have an entirely different perspective of a fresh vibrancy of appreciation and expectancy of "the compassions and mercies of God" being "new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

At the heart of the Christian faith is the awareness of the present-tense quality of newness. The "new covenant" reality of the living Lord Jesus is the essence of the gospel. The Greek text of the New Testament employs two different words for "new."

Generally speaking, the Greek word *neos* indicates "new in time," temporal inauguration or appearance, whereas *kainos* indicates "new in kind," qualitative newness in contrast or comparison with what preceded.

The "new covenant" is both "new (*neos*) in time" (Hebrews 12:24) in its inauguration in Jesus Christ, as well as "new (*kainos*) in kind" (Hebrews 9:15) as contrasted with the old covenant of the Jewish

arrangement. Both of these Greek words are used in Jesus' words about the "new (*neos*) wine" requiring "new (*kainos*) wineskins" (Matthew 9:17; Luke 5:38).

New Year's Resolutions or New Life in Christ?

In the Western world, we use the Gregorian calendar with carefully crafted leap-year calculations that take into account the solar equinox. New Year's Day on January 1 has traditionally been the day when people make "New Year's Resolutions." These are personal determinations and resolve to engage in particular actions, often with commitments to self-improvement—to do better—to "be good."

Common New Year's resolutions include the vow or promise to lose weight, eat healthier foods, exercise more regularly, quit smoking, drink less alcohol, get organized, get out of debt, save more money and the like.

The effectiveness of such determinations of self-resolve is minimal, with estimates of success in fulfilling New Year's Resolutions for more than one month at less than twenty percent. But it seems to make people feel better about themselves that they try to start the new year with good intentions.

Many Christ-followers take a similar approach of self-resolve in

order to live the Christian life. They often make resolutions of commitment to be better Christians (as if that were possible), live a more holy life, attend church more regularly, get closer to God, give more generously, pray more often, read the Bible all the way through, etc.

But such resolutions for living the Christian life are even less effective than the traditional New Year's resolutions of self-improvement. In fact, such resolutions are truly impossible to implement by self-effort.

The Christian life can only be lived by the grace-dynamic of the indwelling Christ, as we faithfully avail ourselves and surrender to HIS empowering. Christians have access to "newness (*kainos*) of life" (Romans 6:4) by the resurrection-life of JESUS supplanting the old condition of spiritual death.

"In Christ" we have become a "new" creature (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15), a "new" man (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10) as contrasted with the "old" man (Romans 6:6) that we were "in Adam."

May we appreciate everything "new" that we have in JESUS this year! □

Adapted from It's All About Jesus by author and theologian Jim Fowler.