

New Year's Message—2022

"A New Year's Challenge"

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(1/2/22)

This morning we stand at the beginning of a new year.

What makes a new year special is the fact that—**well, it's 'new'!**

Every new year brings with it new hope—hope that, in this new year, God will make things in our lives new in the sense of new opportunities, new strength for victory over old sins, a new relationship (if you're single), in short—the hope that this new year will be a better year than last year!

REFLECTION: What is your hope for the new year? Did you make a “new year resolution”?

In this new year there are probably things you'd like to see changed. The problem is for most people when they enter into a new year—**all they do is hope things will change.**

All they do is engage in **wishful thinking** that things will be different—but **they never do anything** to bring about any change. So, it doesn't take long for the hope of a new year to become the same old discouragement, disillusionment, and defeat of the past.

As one author said,

“We can waste the New Year away by sitting around and worrying about the things we failed to accomplish last year, or the mistakes we made throughout the year. We can sit around and mope and have a pity party because things didn't go the way we wanted them to—OR we can decide to make the most of this New Year that God has granted us. This could be the greatest year of your life if you make a conscience decision to do whatever it takes to have a great year.”

- **So, what are you going to do with 2022?**
- **How are you going to make it count?**
- **How will this year be any different than last year?**

The last couple of years have been difficult years for many to say the least—especially when it comes to losing people, we love due to COVID. But also, last year was a difficult year for many when you factor in the loss of jobs, the fear of uncertainty for the future, maybe a broken relationship of some kind, physical sickness—not to mention other disappointments, setbacks, and failures.

Together, all of these things made last year a very difficult year for many.

The bad news is there is nothing we can do to change last year—
the good news is we can learn from the mistakes and failures of last year
and start to make some changes for the new year.

- It's like God is saying at the beginning of each year new—"Let's start over—old things have passed away I want to do something new in your life this year."

Now it's true that change isn't easy but with God's grace and power—it is certainly not impossible either! Remember that small changes each day will add up to big changes by the end of the year. Of course, any change for good in our lives will ultimately come from God's Spirit working in us.

However, it's wrong to think that God does **everything**, and we do **nothing**—that change comes about with no effort on our part. Now when we talk about making changes in this New Year, I can't tell you what to change—I can only work on me and only you can work on you.

But I do know this, if you aim at nothing this year in the way of change—you'll probably 'hit it'!

REFLECTION: Share something you learned from 2021? What changes might you explore for 2022?

Let me share with you what I believe is the best passage in the Bible for practical Christian living.

By God's grace if you work through this list of practical exhortations given by Paul the apostle and apply them into your life when you come to the end of 2022—you'll be able to look back on a very fruitful year—a year of profound and life altering change!

Romans 12:9-21 (NLT)

⁹ Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. ¹¹ Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. ¹² Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. ¹³ When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! ¹⁷ Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD. ²⁰ Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads." ²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

I'm not going to work through the whole list—I'll let that be your New Year's project.

- What I'd like to do this morning is to focus on the first part of **verse 9 which I believe is the core principle of the Christian life.**

If by God's grace you can master this one exhortation everything else will 'fall into place' and 2022 will truly be a life changing year:

"Don't just pretend to love others—really love them [without hypocrisy]" (verse 9a)

The word for "love" in verse 9 is **agape**. The word *agape* is a word that speaks of a deep, unconditional, unselfish love that comes from God—a love that is inherent to His nature. This is a love that we, in our humanness, don't have within us.

The kind of love that dominates the fallen heart of man is—*self-love*. Many don't realize that the love they feel for others is often rooted in *self-love* and polluted by *selfish* interests.

"I love those who love me because—their love for me is an affirmation of my worth and builds up my self-esteem." We often show love to those who can do for us or help us in some way—or to those that make us feel good about ourselves (we see a lot of self-love in marriage today which is why so many marriages are failing).

But God's love (agape) is different—God's love focuses on others and is *unconditional* which means—it's unaffected by how others treat it.

One pastor shared this story about God's love working in the life of a man he knew,

"I saw this in the life of a man I became acquainted with when I first became a Christian. His obvious passion was service to God. He arranged his schedule so he could spend as much time as possible working behind the scenes of our summer youth camp and in his church. He projected a calm and loving spirit. And he was himself one of the most loved men of our denomination. In retrospect I see that he was a master at loving the Church.

At camp one summer some of us (we were then teenagers) were admiring this man, and one of the group began telling us that his daughter had been brutally murdered by a young man the family had taken into their home in an attempt to help him. Amazingly, this man repeatedly went to the prison to minister to his daughter's murderer, finally led him to Christ, and continued to visit him over the years...The love of Christ had mastered him."

You say, "**I could never love like that!**"—of course you couldn't—this is a **supernatural love** we're talking about—it's God's love in operation! **The only way to have God's love within you is to be saved** (Romans 5:5)—but then to keep God's love flowing through you, you need to stay in fellowship with Him (abiding in Him).

REFLECTION: How might you try to define "agape" love to a friend or a new acquaintance or even a stranger?

This allows God's love to continually *fill* you and flow thru you to the people of this unsaved, selfish, fallen world we're living in. **The fruit of that will primarily be manifested in how you treat others—primarily in how you meet their needs.**

1 John 3:16-18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

- This is exactly what Paul meant when he said, “*Don’t just pretend to love others—really love them—tangibly, practically!*”

We really demonstrate God’s love for others when we meet their needs—whatever those needs might be.

- Sometimes the need they have is **physical** (food, clothing, shelter etc.).
- Sometimes it’s **emotional** (forgiveness, affirmation, encouragement or simply spending time with them).
- Other times it’s **spiritual** in nature (sharing the Gospel with them or discipling them).

Of course, God knows that the *greatest* need this fallen world has is for **salvation**. This caused the love of God to meet our need by giving us His only begotten Son (John 3:16). **Remember that God sent His Son into a world of rebels—not allies; of enemies—not friends.**

This is *truly* the love of God in operation—showing love to His enemies.

REFLECTION: Have you had the opportunity to meet the physical, emotional, or spiritual needs for someone? Identify that someone: family, friend, employee, employer, enemy etc.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus made this clear when He told us that loving those who love us (family and friends) doesn’t require God’s love—any unbeliever can love those who love them.

- **God’s love is truly demonstrated when it loves our enemies—as Jesus stated:**

Matthew 5:43-48 (NLT2)

⁴³ “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. ⁴⁸ But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

In these verses we have, in essence, the single greatest Christian ethic—it’s an ethic that differentiates the *Christian* from the *world* as nothing else can.

The dynamic of the Church has always been in its **differentness** from the world.

I think if there is any one principle that best sums up what separates the Christian from the non-Christian (i.e., ‘the saved from the lost’) is the one that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount when He commanded His followers to—**“love our enemies”**.

This folks, is the ‘Mount Everest’ of Christian virtue—the absolute pinnacle of Christian living.

➤ **If love is the greatest thing (1 Corinthians 13) then loving our enemies is the greatest thing love can do!**

And if in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is laying out for us the principles of Kingdom living (as I believe He is)—then this statement in Matthew 5:44 is the climax, **the ultimate goal we should be striving for because nothing identifies us more with our Heavenly Father than loving our enemies:**

Romans 5:8 (NKJV)

⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners [His enemies], Christ died for us.

REFLECTION: Who is your enemy? What have you done to change that relationship or situation?

Now, as we study the Sermon on the Mount—we can see that it is essentially built around two all-important statements. These two statements are kind of obscure in the sense that many Christians breeze right over them without noticing their significance—and yet they really sum up the heart of what Jesus was saying to those who claim to be members of God’s Kingdom.

➤ The **first** one is in verse 47 of chapter 5—**“...what do you do more than others?”**

In other words, the Lord was saying, **“What does your religious system have more than any other? What sets you apart from them? What makes you different?”**

➤ And the **second** statement comes out of chapter 6 verse 8—**“Therefore do not be like them.”**

In some ways these two statements sum up the whole sermon and in fact our whole Christian experience—**“What do you do more than others?”** and **“Do not be like them.”**

What Jesus is saying in both of these simple, yet all-encompassing statements is this—**“When all is said and done what makes you, as a Christian, different from anybody else”**—or in other words, **what sets us apart from the world?**

➤ **“We go to church”**—a lot of people go to church or synagogue or temple or mosque that don’t know the true and living God and are not His people.

➤ **“We worship God”**—a lot of people worship their concept of god.

- “**We serve the Lord**”—a lot of religious people serve their gods.
- “**We have morals**”—a lot of religious and secular people have morals.
- “**We evangelize**”—a lot of people reach out to people to join their group.
- “**Well, we Christians are willing to die for our God**”—do I need to remind anyone here about 9/11?
- **None of those things necessarily differentiates Christians from other groups.**
- **But the one thing that does separate Christians and Christianity from all other people and religions in the world is that we have the love of God in us, which the Holy Spirit has poured into our hearts when we first received Jesus into our hearts at the moment we were ‘born-again’ - at the moment of salvation.**
(Romans 5:5)
- **This is a supernatural love that finds its highest expression when we use it to love our enemies.**

Now of course this sounds like utter lunacy to the people of this world and that's because this is a supernatural love that comes from God and flows through those who are connected to Him through Jesus Christ—and only thru those who connected to God by Jesus thru faith and the new birth.

As such, *this is a divine love that the world knows nothing about.*

Look, the world can repay ‘evil for evil’ and ‘good for good’—and more and more we see the world repaying ‘evil for good’—**but only a child of God has the capacity to consistently repay ‘good for evil’ and ‘love for hatred’.**

Loving your physical family and friends and hating your enemies is natural for the people of the world—but **loving your enemies is a supernatural ethic** that only the children of God can demonstrate.

REFLECTION: How would you explain “I have the Love of God in me”?

Again, Paul said in Romans 5:5 that this is a love that comes from God and has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation.

Peter tells us (2 Peter 1:4) that at that moment we became “*partakers of God’s divine nature*” which allows the attributes of God (the fruit of the Spirit) to be manifested through our lives—and the first attribute to lead the list in Galatians 5:22-23—is God’s agape love!

It is the love of God more than anything else that demonstrates to the people of this world that we belong to Him:

John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love [agape] for one another."

As important as loving our fellow Christians is in revealing to the people of this world that we belong to God—**nothing causes our light to shine brighter than when we love our enemies!** Unfortunately—sometimes those “enemies” are members of our own families who need us to love them by forgiving them for what they have done to us.

I can imagine some of you saying to yourselves, “I’ll forgive them when they’ve **earned** my forgiveness!”

- Listen, **forgiveness isn’t earned it’s bestowed**; as when Jesus, from the cross, bestowed forgiveness upon those who put Him there (Luke 23:34).
- In other words, **forgiveness is a gift we give to those who have hurt or wronged us—not a reward we give to those who have earned or that deserve our forgiveness.**
- **God gave to us forgiveness and eternal life which we could never have earned and by no means deserved—it was (and is) a gift! (Ephesians 2:8-9)**

REFLECTION: Have you experienced forgiveness (received or given)?

You might be sitting there thinking that loving others more (especially your enemies)—wasn’t really on your list of the things you were hoping to see changed in 2022.

- Maybe your hope for the year was to get out of depression and find joy.
- Others of you might have as your goal for this new year to stop drinking or taking drugs and find true peace.
- Some of you would like to lose some weight this year or stop looking at porn and so your goal is to cultivate more self-control.

When I said at the beginning of this message that if you master the first part of Romans 12:9 everything else will fall into place—here’s what I meant:

Again, the word for “**love**” in verse 9 is *agape*—which is a love that only comes from God—it’s inherent to His nature and to His nature alone.

The only way to have it within us is to be connected to God—first through *salvation* and then as a Christian by staying connected to Him every day in *fellowship*.

Jesus said, “**If you abide in Me, you will bear much fruit.**” (John 15:5)

Remember that physical fruit is produced naturally when the branch is connected to the tree—even as we Christians will bear fruit as a ‘**by-product**’ of staying connected (in close personal fellowship) with Jesus.

That fruit is what the Bible calls the fruit of the Spirit—

Galatians 5:22-23 (NKJV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control...

Notice that **God's love leads the list of spiritual fruit**—but there are others.

As we abide in Jesus each day these fruits will be produced in our lives—and will have a profound affect upon our lives in a practical sense. If you want to get out of depression and find joy this year—**abide in Jesus because "in His presence is fullness of joy"** (a fruit of the Spirit).

"I want to stop grasping for peace through alcohol and drugs and find true peace."

God's peace is another fruit of the Spirit that will be produced in your life when you stay close to Him—"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace..." (Galatians 5:22)

I know that many of you would like to lose some weight this year, but self-control has always been a problem.

The key is not to try harder to control your appetite in your own strength—it is to abide longer with Jesus and 'self-control' (another fruit of the Spirit—Galatians 5:23) will grow in your life and give you victory over your appetite this year.

The only way the fruit of the Spirit will fill your life this year is if you as a Christian will stay close to God by abiding in His Son—which then allows His life to flow in and through you.

REFLECTION: How do you plan to stay closer to God this year and experience the fruit of the Spirit?

As I said earlier if you want to see 2022 be a year of change and victory—then purpose in your heart to make some changes by God's grace and strength—again; if you aim for nothing you'll probably 'hit it'.

One Christian author provides some practical exhortations on change for the new year—I'd like to read them to you and then we'll close—

"What's your new year's resolution?" It's a question most of us hear for a few weeks following the passage of another year.

While we often make futile pledges to alter a personal flaw, it's often done with little resolve and possibly a comprehension that we really don't intend to change when it's all said and done.

But a new year is a perfect time to scrutinize our lives and to determine what needs to be amended and

addressed in regard to our personal conduct. For Christians, such reflection should be done on a continuing basis to ensure that we are daily living lives that are pleasing to Christ.

With that said, I thought I would make some propositions for how we can better live out our faith in the coming new year.

A Challenge to Fathers

With the divorce rate in America remaining out of control, I believe it is more important than ever for men to become leaders in their homes. A key to gaining control of many of our nation's moral/social dilemmas is the development of godly fathers.

I urge every Christian dad to renew his commitment to his wife and children in the coming New Year. Live a life of personal sacrifice to ensure that your children are priority #1 in your life.

There is no sure-fire way to secure the future of our children. But by serving as the godly role models in the home, fathers can make an affirmative impact on their children's lives and have a lifelong influence on their futures.

A Challenge to Believers

During the coming year, I am urging Christians to make a vow to glorify God through Bible reading and prayer. Many families in my church are reading the Bible in its entirety this year. This takes a minimal commitment, but by taking the time to read the Bible each day, we can guarantee that we spend time applying God's Word to our lives.

Furthermore, I encourage Christians this year to commit to what is commonly referred to as "quiet time." This daily time of personal devotion helps develop our Christian growth and prayer life. I also suggest that you make a prayer list of items that are of greatest concern to you so that you can recurrently take your concerns to the throne of God.

A Challenge to Get Out of Your Comfort Zone

This year, consider doing something in terms of personal ministry that you've never before done.

Here are a few examples: teach a Sunday school class, serve on a short-term mission's trip, personally commit to financially supporting a missionary family, mentor a fatherless child, start a Bible study in your home, care for a home-bound individual, coach a church sports team.

There are countless ways to serve others. I fervently encourage believers to live out their faith by utilizing their gifts and talents in new ways.

It is imperative that we become better stewards of our time, talent and treasure in order to impact the culture for the cause of Christ. It is impossible to imagine the impact we could have on our nation if every Christian were to make a commitment to living out his/her faith in a new way in the new year.

We live in painfully uncertain times. And in such times, people's hearts are hungry for truth and perspective. May we commit to being reliable and responsible ambassadors of Christ in the New Year as we seek to find new ways to present the Gospel to our fellow man."

As far as the theme of this message being—"loving your enemies"—there is a reason I felt led by God to teach on this subject as the first message of the New Year.

I'm not going to tell you that reason—at least not yet.

I just wanted that principle to usher you into this new year and to be at the forefront of your heart and mind.

As the days of this new year unfold—may God give us the grace to draw close to Him and love all people—especially our enemies.

This will demonstrate to the people of this world more powerfully than anything else that we are truly children of God!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—***2022 may just be the most impactful year of your life!***

Please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).