

Opening: A time of transition.

When you were a child, your parents most likely taught you several universal things. 'Don't talk to/take candy from strangers', 'don't play with matches', 'share with others', 'be grateful'. These things tend to be the same, no matter the culture or socioeconomic status. One of these universal phrases is 'look both ways before you cross the street'. The idea is that you can only protect yourself if you know what is going on. If you step out into traffic, you will probably be hit.

The concept is an important one. Whenever we come to a marker, a road so to speak, in life, we tend to look both ways before we cross. We look behind to see what we have done, and before to plan what we will do. It is wise for us to do so, to keep life from running us over. The problem is that we tend to expect perfection from ourselves, and we end up disappointed.

God asks for your brokenness, not YOUR perfection. Eph 2:8-9. It is only through you being broken, that HIS perfection can shine through you. He does ask for perfection, but not yours - He asks for his. Gal 3:10-13.

Remember that God is watching the road of life for you. Ps 139:5-6

1 - On what do you stand?

The end of the year is often a time of introspection. We tend to judge ourselves as we look back, and worry that we will have the same failures as we look forward. It is easy to remember that we continue to make mistakes and hard to remember when we are forgiven.

1 John 3:18-20 tells us that no matter our feelings on the subject, God's forgiveness is complete. He only asks that we love one another (v23). The Christmas season is one that focuses on love, and as the new year rolls in we have to remember the lessons that Christmas teaches. It isn't just one day after all, but a reminder of an example of perfect love that should follow us all year.

It basically all boils down to one thing: pride. Do you look first to yourself to pull on your own bootstraps and climb out of the miry pit in which you find yourself? To 'self actualize' your 'nietzsche'esque superman? Or do you first turn to God to lift you from the waters and to let you stand upon the sea? (Matt 14:28-30)

Don't stand on your own strength which is small (Ps 82:7, Isa 40:30), stand on his strength which is great. (Ps 18:32-34, Isa 40:28,29,31) Don't stand on your righteousness which is as filthy rags (Isa 64:6) stand on His righteousness which is as a white robe (Rev 3:17-19). Don't stand on shifting sand, stand upon the rock! (Matt 7:24-27)

2 - Where are you looking?

One of the things we like to focus on is how we lived up to the standards we make for ourselves. 'Did I achieve my new year's resolutions from last year?', 'what is a reasonable goal?', 'how much is enough?'. While these questions are legitimate and can even be helpful, many questions are not - such as 'am I doing a better job than those around me?' or 'am I living up to what other people wish of me?'. Don't try to do things so that you can be better than other people, or so that you can gain the approval of other people - do them so that you can make God happy. (2 Cor 5)

When we seek to please men instead of God, we betray Christ. (Gal 1:10-11) Do not look to men for your approval, not even to yourself. That's not to say that you should be offensive or dismiss people, just that you focus on Christ. In fact, when you focus on the kingdom of God (which is pleasing to Him) you often gain the approval of men as well. (Rom 14:15-20)

3 - Where are you headed?

Scripture tells us that to be aimless is to set oneself up for failure. (Prov 29:18) The law gives us a framework of goals - good things for which to strive. (Rom 7:12) That isn't to say that you should make those goals into expectations. (James 4:13-17) When we set up expectations, we set ourselves up for disappointment. Time and circumstance happen to all men (Ecc 9:11). It is a matter of God's sovereignty over chance. As Solomon said "the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord". (Prov 16:33)

Closing:

Introspection is a good thing. It helps us to stay on track. Without standards and goals we would drift aimlessly and never get anything done, and without taking a look at how we lived up to those goals there would be no point in making them. But don't forget that looking backwards is only one direction - look both ways before you cross the street. (Phil 3:14) tells us to press on. The law creates a framework for our goals, it gives us a set of standards against which to measure ourselves. Don't let it chain you down, let it instead be completed by Christ (Matt 5:17-20).

Instead of a law of sin and death, we have a law of the Spirit of Life. (Rom 8:2-4) It still acts as a mirror for us to see what is wrong, but it no longer condemns us - it instead provides us a way to please God. (Jas 1:23-25) We don't please God by standing under our own power and by trying to shoulder everything ourselves, we please God by standing up for Christ. (Eph 6:5-18)

Ending song: Stand up, Stand up for Jesus

Scripture list:

Eph 2:8-9

Gal 3:10-13

Ps 139:5-6

1 John 3:18-20, 23

Matt 14:28-30

Ps 82:7

Isa 40:30

Ps 18:32-34

Isa 40:28-31

Isa 64:6

Rev 3:17-19

Matt 7:24-27

2 Cor 5 (do not put in list)

Gal 1:10-11

Rom 14:15-20

Prov 29:18

Rom 7:12

James 4:13-17

Ecc 9:11

Prov 16:33

Phil 3:14

Matt 5:17-20

Rom 8:2-4

Jas 1:23-25

Eph 6:5-18