

What If I Wanted My Church To Be Stronger #3 Part 4 – Loving the Lord

Introduction; New Beginnings are good.

A. It is good to start over many times.

1. I do this sometimes on my computer. I have used it for a year or two and loaded a lot of programs I no longer use. The operating system also has some problems.
2. I may save my files and have the hard drive reformatted. I then reload what I really need. This works for a year or so and I need to do it again.
3. Some people get a new start in life. They may get a new and better job. They may move to a newer and better home. Or they may take classes to do something they always wanted to do.
4. Others may get out of prison and someone gives them a good job. They have a chance to start anew and build a newer and better life.

B. We are beginning a new year.

1. This is a time when we think of new things. Things are going to be better this year many think. They make resolutions to be better and do better.
2. Most resolutions do not last long. However they show that we are concerned about new beginnings. Below is a list of some good New Year's resolutions that I got from the internet.
Resolved, That I will do whatsoever I think to be most to the glory of God, and my own good, profit, and pleasure, in the whole of my duration; without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence.
Resolved, to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general.
Resolved, never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.
Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.
Resolved, never to do any thing, which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.
Resolved, Never to speak evil of any one, so that it shall tend to his dishonor, more or less, upon no account except for some real good.
Resolved, To study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive, myself to grow in the knowledge of the same. —C. Swindoll.

C. God gives us a chance for a new beginning.

1. He does this in several ways. If we are a sinner He gives us a chance to be forgiven of our sins and become a Christian.
2. If we are a Christian and turn from God and His church, He gives us a chance to turn back to Him, be forgiven of our sins and return to the fold of the saints.
3. If we have not been as active as we should be in the kingdom of God He wants to give us another chance to change our lives and do the things we should in the church.

D. We will talk about 'New Beginnings' today.

1. We want to see the beginning of the church, the kingdom of God in Acts 2 and the beginning of the new life we have in Jesus Christ.
2. We want to see the second chance we have at a new beginning when we sin and then repent and pray for forgiveness in Acts 8.
3. We also want to see the opportunity we have to revive our faith and make ourselves and our congregation stronger in Revelation 2 & 3.

E. To have a new beginning we must first become a child of God.

1. A new beginning in Christ

A. The most important beginning is in Christ.

1. This began in Acts 2 when there was another important new beginning. This was the new beginning of God's kingdom.
2. Up to this point in time the kingdom of God has been the Jewish kingdom. It was an earthly, physical kingdom. It was a kingdom people were born into. They had no choice. Yet God had promised a better kingdom and law.
3. *Jer 31:31-34 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" —Heb 8:7-13.*
4. God promised a new kingdom —Dan 2, Joel 2, Isa 2, etc. He promised a new covenant with it. Things would be different. It would not be like the old Jewish kingdom. It would be a new beginning.

B. The church is the new kingdom.

1. It had a very majestic beginning in Acts 2. It was a successful beginning. The power of God was displayed. Prophecy was fulfilled. Many were saved.
 - a. **Acts 2:1-8;** The kingdom of God came with the power of the Spirit of God. Men saw this and were impressed.
 - b. Mark 9:1 *And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power."*
 - c. **Acts 2:14-21;** The kingdom of God fulfilled prophecy. God had promised the kingdom hundreds and thousands of years beforehand. These prophecies all come to pass in Acts 2.
 - d. Acts 3:24 *"Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days."*
 - e. **Acts 2:36-43, 46-47;** Many were saved from their sins. Then entered the kingdom and had all the blessings that God promised through Jesus Christ.
 - f. Eph 1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...*
2. The means into the kingdom was faith, repentance and baptism. This is seen here and throughout the whole New Testament. Three thousand had a new beginning the first day.
3. *Mark 16:15-16 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."*
4. *Acts 18:8 Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.*
5. *Acts 22:16 'And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'*
6. The new beginning starts in baptism. Faith and repentance must lead up to it but the new beginning begins in baptism —despite what many men and churches say.
7. *Acts 8:35-39 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. 36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" 37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. 39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.*
8. The Ethiopian wanted to be baptized. Yet first he had to believe. He rejoiced after being baptized because it was then he had his new beginning.
9. *Rom 6:3-7 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united to-*

gether in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin.

10. We are raised from the watery grave of baptism in *newness of life*. We begin a new life in Christ. We are baptized into His death and are raised with Him. We share His death and resurrection and victory over sin. Our sins are washed away and we are new creatures —2 Cor 5:17.
11. This is why the Ethiopian rejoiced. He was glad his sins were washed away and he was united with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.

C. We see that we can have a new beginning in Jesus Christ.

11. A new beginning in the church

A. There is no ‘once saved, always saved.’

1. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. This does not change when we become a Christian. We should ‘sin less,’ but we are not ‘sinless.’
2. A child of God can fall into sin and be lost. However the Lord wants us back and will receive us when we repent, pray and change.
3. Many who have followed the Lord at one time turn their backs on Him and are lost. The Lord wants them back. However that is their choice. God does not force us to be saved —nor does He predestine us to be saved.
4. *1 Cor 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. ²⁵ And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. ²⁶ Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*
5. Paul was very active in the church. He was an apostle and evangelist. He suffered much for the Lord. Yet he recognized that he could be lost and worked to make sure that did not happen.
6. Paul had a new beginning in Christ when his sins were washed away in baptism in Acts 9 —see also Acts 22:16. However he knew he could be lost. Therefore he did things to make sure that didn’t happen. We need to do this to.

B. There are some Christians who need another new beginning.

1. In the early church there were many who sinned. They received a chance to repent. Some took that opportunity but some did not.
2. *Acts 5:7-10 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." ⁹ Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰ Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.*
3. Ananias and Sapphira lied about how much they gave to help the needy in the church in Jerusalem. Both died because they did not repent. Here Peter gives Sapphira a chance to admit her sins and she will not.
4. When the gospel returns to Samaria a strong church is started. Many, like Simon the sorcerer, renounce their sins and turn to the Lord. Yet Simon longs for the power he had before and sins in asking for the power of the apostles to give miraculous gifts.
5. *Acts 8:18-24 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. ²² Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." ²⁴ Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."*
6. Peter condemns Simon. He then tells him to 1) repent and 2) pray for forgiveness. Simon is convinced of his sins and does not want to be lost. He asks Peter and John to pray for him as well. Since Christians can be lost

- we should pray for one another when we fall into serious or continual sins.
7. *James 5:16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*
 8. All of us sin some. However we should not walk in sin, i.e. sin continually. We should all walk in righteousness, i.e. do good continually. Sin is serious no matter how righteous we are and still separates us from God —Rom 3:23. God has told us in His word what to do about sin.
 9. *1 John 1:6-10 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*
 10. In Jesus' model prayer He said to ask for forgiveness —Matt 6:12. We ask forgiveness based on our forgiving others. This need to be a regular part of our continual praying —1 Thess 5:17. We need to pray often for forgiveness.
 11. When we sin often or seriously we need to repent publicly and ask others to pray for us too. We can have a new beginning even after becoming a Christian.

C. We see then that even children of God need new beginnings. We can have them.

III. A new beginning for the church

A. Sometimes a congregation needs a revival.

1. The church, as a group, is not doing what it should in the kingdom of God. These means that many or most of the members are not doing what they should to make the church strong.
2. Sometimes this involves doctrine. The group has turned aside to error. They are following the doctrines and wisdom of men. Denominationalism is an example of this. Churches like this certainly need a new beginning.
3. *2 Tim 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*
4. At other times a group may stand for the truth. They may worship in the correct way and not turn aside to following the wisdom of men. Yet they are not all that they should be.
5. They stand for doctrinal truth. Yet they are not actively fulfilling the mission of the Lord's church. They are not evangelistic. They are not active in helping one another and encouraging each other.
6. *Rev 3:14-16 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.'*
7. God hates inactivity as much as He hates the wrong activity. We need to be active in the kingdom of God. However we need to be active in doing the things God tells us to do.

B. We should be working to make our church stronger.

1. This involves many things. It involves a) making ourselves stronger, b) helping others to be stronger as well and c) giving all we can for the work of the church.
2. Being lukewarm is a serious problem in the churches. Just doing things, even though right, out of habit, tradition or self-satisfaction is also a serious problem.
3. Many do the right things but not out of a love for God and the truth. They stand for truth and at one time worked hard in the vineyard of the Lord. Yet they leave their first love. We must beware of this.
4. *Rev 2:1-5 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place; unless you repent.'*
5. Ephesus had many good qualities. They had done much good for the Lord over the years. They were no

- longer working for the Lord who loved them and died for them. They may trust in past accomplishments. Yet they no longer love doing all the will of God.
6. It seems they are not working as they once did. They need to do the first works. Many older churches are like this. They are no longer working at converting others as they one did. Their hearts are no long on fire for the Lord.
 7. *Luke 24:32 And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'*
 8. Do we enjoy worshipping God? Do we crave Bible study privately and with the saints? Are we as active as we can be in the service of the Lord? Do we really think about God love for us and His sacrifice for us? Do we really love the Lord and show it?
 9. *Psa 122:1 I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD."*
 10. *Psa 119:97 Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.*
 11. *Ecc1 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.*

C. **We need to make sure we, and our congregation, is active in serving the Lord.**

Conclusion: We may need a new beginning.

A. **It may be personal. We need to become a Christian.**

1. We become a new creature in Christ through faith, repentance and baptism. We turn to the Lord and are baptized into Him.
2. Some of the saints have turned aside to sin. They have turned their backs on the church of the Lord. They need to repent and pray for forgiveness. The church can pray for them too.
3. Some churches need to rededicate themselves to the Lord and return to their first love. They need to be active for the Lord who died for them.

B. **If we can help anyone have a new beginning, please let us.**