

## Continue Thou

Tomorrow is January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

I'm told that the word "January" comes from the Latin word for "door" (*ianua*). The mythological Roman god of the doorway is Janus (Ianuarius).

January is the door to a new year. We typically think about new beginnings in January. Perhaps we make new year's resolutions or renewed commitments. We plan to start something new or end something old. January is a time for starting new things.

Today I'd like to focus on something a bit different; I'd like to call our attention, not to starting something new, but to persevering in those things that matter, retaining important commitments into the new year. We continue on with such things no matter what the calendar says; we persevere in these things from year to year. We bring these things with us through the door to the new year.

The biblical authors repeatedly urge us to "hold fast" to certain things and to "continue" in various ways.

2Ti 1:13 ***Hold fast** the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.*

2 Tim 3:14 *But **continue thou** in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.*

Heb 2:1 *... we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.*

Perhaps in the new year, we may be tempted to let things "slip." It might be our Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, witnessing, or our moral standards. It's easy to let things slip. But instead of letting things slip, we must strengthen "the things that remain."

Rev 3:2 *Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, ...*

What are the most important things to hold on to and continue in this coming new year? How can we "strengthen the things which remain" into this new year? How can we continue in them?

There are two basic areas in which God expects us to persevere: faith and good works. These are two major obligations that we bring with us through the door of the new year. Let's think about these two major obligations—faith and good works.

I. Persevere in faith in the new year.

There are several senses in which we must persevere in faith.

A. Persevere in your faith in Christ.

The biblical writers often present faith as something we need to maintain. Faith is genuine if it persists and it is fraudulent if it does not.

1Co 15:2 ... *ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.*

Col 1:23 *if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, ...*

Heb 3:14 *For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;*

1 Jn 2:3 *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.*

1. Genuine faith persists; it perseveres; we maintain our faith in Christ “steadfast unto the end.” That’s the mark of genuine salvation.
2. For many of us, faith in Christ is not even questionable; faith in Jesus is like breathing the air. Faith in Christ never even comes into doubt. We don’t have to work at maintaining faith in Jesus. It’s almost part of our DNA.
3. But for others, faith in Christ is weak. Some believers doubt. They waver. They have questions, fears, and reservations.

Mr 9:24 ... *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*

4. For some, their faith is not merely weak; it's gone. Sadly, some people claim to have lost their faith in Jesus. Every so often, we hear of famous people turning away from faith in Jesus. Over the last few years, I've noticed several high-profile people who have left the faith.
  - a) The modern term for this is "deconstruction." If you hear about someone "deconstructing" his faith, it means that he has reconsidered his faith and dropped it. To deconstruct your faith usually means that you no longer have any faith.
  - b) The biblical term for those who fall away from the faith is "apostates." They previously had affirmed the faith, but now they deny it—that's apostasy.
  - c) What is the spiritual condition of such people? The Bible tells us that those who *permanently* turn away from faith in Christ were never genuinely saved. 1 John 2:19
  - d) Jesus told the parable of the different kinds of soil, in which some who showed initial enthusiasm failed to bring forth fruit (Luke 8).
  - e) We trust that in some cases, those who turn away from the faith will return. E.g., the Prodigal Son, Peter
  - f) While some are deconstructing their faith, we hear of others coming to faith in Christ. We hear of many former Muslims and Jews coming to faith in Christ. Even in places like China, Iran, and India, people are coming to faith in Christ. Christianity is still a growing faith.
  - g) And if you have not yet come to faith in Christ, we invite you to do so. Repent and believe the Gospel.

5. The Bible often uses the conditional word “if” when describing faith—“if you continue,” “if you hold fast,” “if you keep in memory.” That reflects the fact that many who profess to be saved fail to continue, fail to hold fast, and fail to keep in memory the truth of the Gospel.
6. Those who reject the faith do not lose their salvation; they prove by their failure to persevere that they were not saved in the first place.
7. Thankfully, faith in Jesus is one of the most rational and sensible things you can have. We don’t need to deconstruct our faith; we need to strengthen our faith and persist in it. We need to bring it with us through the door of the new year.

**App:** Maybe you don’t need encouragement to retain your faith in Christ. But maybe you do. Maybe you need to understand that there are very good reasons to believe in Jesus and the things that he said. Christians for nearly 2000 years have been defending the faith and providing good and reasonable arguments demonstrating the truth of the Christian faith.

Perhaps you should dedicate time and effort this coming year to grow in your faith, to strengthen it, and to deepen it. Maybe you should read the Bible more and read some good books that will strengthen and expand your faith. That would be a great NY resolution.

B. Persevere in your faith in God’s Word.

John 8:31 *Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”*

2 Tim 1:13 **Hold fast** *the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.*

1. The Christian faith is only as strong as the word of God. If the Bible is the word of God—and it is—then faith in Jesus is eminently reasonable.
2. The Bible claims to be the word of God and demonstrates that that claim is true.

3. We have very good reasons for believing the Bible.
  - a) Manuscript evidence points to the truth of the Bible.
  - b) Historical and archaeological evidence points to the truth of the Bible—people, places, historical events.
  - c) These are not mythical, legendary tales. The Bible is an accurate historical record of things that actually happened in space and time.

There is a great deal of skepticism and doubt in our world today. Many people doubt the word of God. But many people are ignorant of all the evidence that supports the claims of Christianity. Many are led astray by false teachers, phonies, and frauds.

But all of that does not affect the truth of God's Word. As we approach the new year, we must maintain our faith in the Word of God. In fact, we should seek to strengthen and deepen that faith.

C. Persevere in sound doctrine.

2 Thes 2:15 *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and **hold the traditions** which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.*

1 Tim 4:16 *Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; **continue in them**: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*

2 Tim 3:14 *But **continue thou** in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, ...*

We are surrounded by false doctrine. Cults and false teachers are very common. Some of the most popular preachers in the media today promote serious doctrinal errors. Jesus warns us about false teachers and wolves in sheep's clothing. So we have to be very careful and discerning.

In spite of all the falsehood surrounding us, we must strive to persevere in sound doctrine—like the Bereans—“search the Scripture.”

D. Persevere in the Christian life.

Persevering in the faith obviously means that we continue to *demonstrate* our faith. We continue worshipping God. We continue in fellowship with like-minded believers in church. We continue proclaiming the Gospel. We continue having daily devotions. We continue living a morally upright life. In other words, we continue living the Christian life, continue walking with God.

The new year may have many challenges for us. Often, people turn away from faith in Christ, faith in the Bible, and faith in sound doctrine because of tragic events in their lives. When tragedy strikes, they begin questioning whether God is really good, if he's powerful, if he cares. Those who experience suffering and pain may question God's providence, even God's existence.

We must examine the source of our doubts. Doubt often comes from internal emotions; we often base our spiritual condition on how we feel. That's a big mistake. Your spiritual condition is based on facts, not primarily on feelings.

Some people have doubts based on intellectual or historical issues. But today we have more facts on our side than ever before. There is more verifiable, empirical evidence demonstrating the truth of Christianity than ever before. Sadly, many people are ignorant of such facts. They hear all the skepticism and criticism of the Bible and of the Christian faith, but they don't hear all the evidence and proof supporting Christianity.

**Trans:** One of the marks of a genuine Christian is that he perseveres in the faith. We have very good reasons to persist in our faith in Christ, in his word, and in sound theology. In fact, we not only continue in such things, we strengthen them, we grow deeper in them. Perhaps that's what we need to focus on for this coming year—strengthening the things that remain, standing fast, holding on to the traditions we've been taught.

We do that by reading the Bible and by participating in the normal operation of the Christian faith—church attendance, worship, fellowship, evangelism, service, godly behavior.

We can also strengthen our faith by reading good Christian books, especially those that explain the many reasons for our faith. Explaining and defending the Christian faith is the discipline of apologetics, and many good apologetic materials are available. I could recommend a few if you are interested.

If we fail to persist in these things, we have good reasons to doubt if our faith is genuine. This coming year, let's focus on remaining faithful and persevering in faith. Let's make sure to bring our faith in God and in his word through the door of the new year.

## II. Persevere in good works.

Mt 5:16 *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

Good works is a very large category. Many things can fit in the "good works" file folder. We can sub-divide that folder into smaller categories. I like to think about doing good works in terms of our various vocations. Most of us have at least four vocations. We should be seeking to let our light shine in these four major areas. We must maintain good works in these four areas this coming year.

- A. Persevere in *clan* (family) good works; consider how you can persevere in good works in your family context.
  1. After your own personal relationship with God, your highest obligation is to your family. Family is the first institution God created, and family deserves a large amount of our attention.
  2. Part of family obligations is fulfilling your God-given roles or responsibilities in your home.
    - a) Fathers are responsible to provide for, protect, lead, and love the members of their family. Fathers in particular are obligated to raise up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Fathers largely set the spiritual tone or atmosphere of the home.

- b) Mothers are responsible to care for the home and the children. Practically speaking, mothers usually have a huge influence on their children. Even those women who work outside the home usually have a huge influence over the home and family.
- c) Children are responsible to honor their parents and to learn.

**App:** Our modern culture is desperately trying to overthrow the traditional Christian concept of the home and family. Many in our world want to destroy biblical gender roles in the family. They are promoting a completely different picture of the family—an unbiblical, anti-Christian picture. Christians families must resist and reject any kind of family structure that violates biblical standards. E.g., we don't recognize homosexual marriage or trans-gender relationships.

We must be very strong and bold in our defense of the biblical Christian home and family. No matter what the culture is doing, and no matter what pressures come against the traditional family, we must persist/persevere in operating our families according to biblical guidelines and expectations. We must fulfill our God-given roles and responsibilities.

Our homes should be filled with good works. We should be persisting in good works within our families.

- B. Persevere in *church* good works. Consider how to engage in good works in the context of the church.
  - 1. God's program for this age is the local church. We are living in the church age. The local church should be a high priority for every Christian. We believe in the preeminence of the local church. From the book of Acts to the book of Revelation, the NT is centered on the local church.



2. This coming year, strive to maintain your commitment to the local church. Attend the services, serve in the areas that you are gifted, support the work financially, and seek to expand the ministry—be part of things, participate in the life and work of the church. We get stronger and more mature in the faith by participating in opportunities for education and instruction. E.g., SS, Sun afternoon, Wed pm.

Many Christians today have little or no relationship to a local church. I call them “lone wolf” Christians. Maybe they watch church on a screen at home or attend Bible studies, but they are not part of the life of a church. That is a huge inconsistency; I’d call failure to be part of a church sin. They are violating NT commands to assemble regularly with fellow believers.

Cf. Heb 10:25 “Not forsaking the assembly of ourselves...”

3. One of the best good works that we can be involved in is spreading the Gospel. One of our main obligations is to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. The Great Commission commands us to make disciples of all nations. We fulfill the Great Commission, partially, through our participation in the church.
4. Some perhaps should think seriously about becoming a member of the church this coming year. You really cannot fulfill all your biblical obligations without being a member of a church.
5. Perhaps some here today should think about vocational service in the local church. You could serve the church as your occupation, your profession. You could make plans to do that.

We must persist in our commitment to the preeminence of the local church.

- C. Persevere in *community* good works.

1. Jesus said that the second great command was for us to love our neighbors. We “let our light shine” in our community, our neighborhood. We want to be good citizens, good neighbors.
2. One of the ways to do this is to pray for those in authority over us. We should be praying for those holding political office, our elected representatives at every level—local, state, and federal.

We should be praying that God would remove from office those wicked, ungodly, corrupt people who are leading our country astray. We should replace them with decent people.

3. Of course, we should vote; that’s a major part of our civic obligation as citizens. One of the reasons we have such perverse and corrupt political leaders is that many Christians don’t vote. Every election cycle, I hear that thousands or millions of professing Christians did not vote. That’s a great tragedy and it’s also a failure to fulfill our obligations. Failure to vote is really a vote for ungodly, corrupt government.
4. Perhaps some of us could serve the community in other ways, such as running for elective office.
5. We should also all strive to be good testimonies in our communities and neighborhoods. We should try to get to know our neighbors so that we can reach them with the Gospel. We should strive to be good citizens and do good within our community.

D. Persevere in *career*/vocational good works. Consider how you can do good works in the context of your occupation.

1. Our jobs are often the channel through which we demonstrate our love for our neighbors.
2. Customer service is not merely a way to grow a business. Serving customers is a way of loving your neighbor. It’s a way of demonstrating the love of Christ to others.

3. Doing quality work is a good testimony for Christ. The Bible tells us to labor for the glory of God and for the good of others. We can serve Christ by serving others.

*Ephesians 6:5–7 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; 6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,*

4. Our jobs give us opportunities to do good work for our employers and for our customers. Perhaps this coming year, we can do better quality work or have better relationships with our employers, co-workers, and customers.

We are one day away from January 1. We are standing at the door to the new year. In just a few hours, it will be 2024.

It's wonderful to make new year's resolutions, but it may be even better to make sure that you persevere *into* the new year. The Bible exhorts us to continue, to abide, to hold fast, and to remain in the Christian faith and in good works. We don't want to let such things slip.

How? Of course, we have a role to play; we must persevere; we must make the efforts. But we also trust that God will enable us to persevere. The HSp empowers us to continue, to abide, to hold fast, and to remain. We must yield ourselves to God and trust him to enable us to persevere in faith and in good works.

As we go through the door to the new year, let's make sure that we bring our faith and our good works with us. Let's not only continue, remain, and abide; let's also strengthen the things that remain in 2024.