

New Year traditions seem to get stronger the farther north you go. I think it's because in pagan times, it was the time when the sun got lower and lower in the sky and threatened to disappear altogether unless, by all kinds of rituals, the gods could be appeased. Nowadays people don't pray, and the days *still* begin to get longer again, so they have concluded there is no God.

The Bible says there *is* a God, true enough, but that even if we performed rituals from here to doomsday we could never pay him for the right to have another year of sunshine, rain and blessing. Instead he gives it to us anyway, whether we deserve it or not. *He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5.45)*. What we call "natural laws" are actually just God's habit of being kind.

Isn't it sad that those of us who believe in the God of the Bible still live as though he *didn't* exist? If we celebrate New Year, is there any gratitude in our mind to God for giving us another year to live, despite the ways in which we've added to the sum of human misery during the previous year? Or do we shrug and say, "Everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation"?

If I had to make one New Year's resolution, it would be to remember just how dependant I am on the continued kindness of God. When I wake up, to thank him that I have lived to see another day. When I am treated well, to remember that the blessing of family and friends comes direct from him. When I buy a pair of shoes or a Mars Bar, to know that it is he who gives the ability to earn money.

And if on the other hand God should take away something I cherish, to be reminded that true riches only come from depending on him. Jesus Christ, after all, was willing to give up heaven itself in obedience to his Father - and his own life, that I should have it eternally.

I may not be able to earn the right to the New Year by religious rituals - but I can from a thankful heart aim to live a life that pleases him.

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