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A new attitude

MAKE IT YOUR RESOLUTION TO OBEY GOD

➔ My son said to me about a Christmas membership to the local fitness center: “Don’t worry if it’s crowded in January. By February you will have the place to yourself.”

The half-life of New Year’s resolutions is a stock joke of American culture. But is the making of resolutions different for Christians? Ought we to resolve things, or ought we not?

The psalmist said (whether on New Year’s Day, I know not): “I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. ... I will know nothing of evil” (Psalm 101:2-4).

Job said: “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?” (Job 31:1).

Paul said: “I will not be dominated by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

The psalmist again: “When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies; I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments” (Psalm 119:59-60).

How do you feel about that kind of language? Does it smack of perfectionism? Is it unheard of in your church? God loves it. Or do we file these men in a special category—never mind that James says they were men “with a nature like ours” (James 5:17)?

The cited declarations above are nothing if not resolutions. So the question for us modern disciples is this: Are you and I of the 21st century also encouraged to resolve to obey (and not just at New Year’s but every moment of every day)? What if your best friend in Bible study group said to you, like Paul, “I will not be dominated by anything”? Would you take her aside and gently rebuke her presumption?

The question is important because confusion on this basic point induces paralysis that gets



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us nowhere in sanctification. God writes what he writes so that we will not sin; that is his stated purpose (1 John 2:1a). And if we strive for that, and find ourselves falling, there is a remedy (1 John 2:1b). But if we assume the sinning right off the bat, we will surely sin. Is it likely you will sin this week? You are not even supposed to focus on that question; that is where we go wrong. You are supposed to focus on living right now in obedience. By God’s power. Which you have.

Even in the most mundane things, resolution is the minimum prerequisite for any action. You cannot even tie your shoe without resolving to do so. Is “Christian” action of a different species than shoe-tying? Is resolution a good quality in the latter but a no-no in the former? If I have been severely humbled by some event, and in great fear of the Lord I resolve never to be haughty again, am I to be encouraged by you? What if resolve arises from fervent faith in “him who is able to keep [me] from stumbling and to present [me]

blameless” (Jude 24)?

Who’s talking about sinless perfection? We are talking about God’s emphasis on attitude. We are talking about the mindset He commands upon awaking in the morning. Do we wake up assuming defeat? (It pleases Satan well.) Or do we say to ourselves, first thing when the sun rises: “I can do all things today through Christ who strengthens me!”? Do we joyfully say like Paul, “I will not be dominated by anything today, Lord, because You are faithful, and You will not let me be tempted beyond my ability, but with the temptation You will also provide the way of escape. Praise be to You!”?

There is not a single verse in Scripture that says anything close to “Don’t try too hard to obey.” I don’t even want to be standing in line at Judgment Day next to the guy who taught that doctrine, lest lightning strike. It is the Lord (not man) who says: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). There is resolution for you. There shall be my focus. ☉