

#36 “Resolve to Follow Christ”

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Sometimes as a new calendar year begins, people make resolutions to be different, to do certain things less, and to commit to doing certain things more. Yet there is nothing inherently miraculous about a new calendar year which will enable us to make accurate resolutions and then keep them. There is nothing inherently wrong with making resolutions, but why should we wait for a new year to be doing so? The Biblical model is to focus on being like Christ daily, being resolute to live as servants of Him all the time.

The reality is that, for many people, New Year’s resolutions, or any resolutions for that matter, don’t last but a few days or weeks, if even that long. Eventually, old habits and behavior patterns return, and the resolutions are abandoned or forgotten. Yet the sad thing is that once the calendar switches years again, the same resolutions may well be made again only to suffer the same fate of a breakdown of willpower and perseverance. So how does lasting change occur and how can we be sure that our resolutions lead to actual, true growth?

If we choose to make resolutions, we need to be sure that they are Biblical in nature. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be a better spouse or parent, learning a proper work-home balance, or trying to get into better shape. But these resolutions are meaningless if they are not grounded in a conviction by the Holy Spirit as to specific ways in which we need to change. General terms of “betterment,” “growth,” and “improvement” need to be measured by specific Scriptural admonitions and standards. If our hearts are not burdened over a failure to honor God by submitting to His Word, we may modify our behavior for a time, but we will fail at changing our hearts and having our minds conformed to God’s Word.

The process of true growth according to the Bible is called sanctification. It is God working in our hearts by His grace through our faith to convict us of sin, to move us to forsake that sin, and to love and desire His ways. We need to go to God’s Word and listen to the Spirit of God at work in our hearts to know where we need to change. David prayed in Psalm 139:23-24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.” He wasn’t simply resolving to try harder to be a better person. He was interested in learning where specifically he fell short of God’s holy standards. He wanted to know where he had sin that he needed to be aware of so he could forsake it and thereby grow and change. His resolution was to walk in practical holiness as the Spirit of God led him in the everlasting way of God, as opposed to the ways of the world.

For Christians, making resolutions ought not to be that complex. All we need to do is to be in God’s Word so that we can look at it like a mirror and then make the needed changes as God reveals our defects. James 1:22-25 says,

“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”

The point is that God’s Word is the mirror to our soul, and as we look into it with humble hearts, God will reveal places of error and fault. Just as a person looks at himself in the mirror and doesn’t present himself publicly until all the blemishes are covered and everything is just as it should be, so too are we to present ourselves spiritually. Romans 12:1 says that we need to present our bodies as living and holy sacrifices unto God. We cannot do this unless we look into the mirror of the Word so that we know where we need to change. Identifying where we need to change is no more complicated than being in God’s Word and humbly yielding to the conviction of the Spirit.

The actual changing is really not any more complicated. Change is as simple as confessing our sin, repenting of it, and by faith walking by the Spirit in obedience. Might it be a struggle as Satan battles us and tries to tempt us and destroy our faith? Sure, we can count on more spiritual attacks as we deal with sin. For those who ignore what they see in the mirror, Satan already has won his victory, but as we change, there will be opposition. Yet Christ is able to strengthen us to stand against the wiles of the devil. We need Christ in Whom we have all that we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Our willpower alone won’t enable us to resist temptation. We need the grace of God and the faith to believe. Christ is our sufficiency, and our ability to be sustained in holiness and obedience is dependent upon our faith in Christ’s power, grace, and faithfulness. May God give us grace to believe the truth of Scripture and the strength to walk in it.

Every day is a day to resolutely follow Jesus Christ. He alone can lead us to true and lasting change. May we listen to Him.