



New Year's Resolutions...Exercise of Faith or Presumption?

by Brad Winsted

Each New Year brings with it a time of countless resolutions that believers and unbelievers alike proclaim. There is something inherently a part of the human spirit that loves the idea of something new: new beginnings, a fresh start, a blank slate, turning the corner, a new day/era/year. You can start a new diet or stop smoking or start a new project or a new relationship or even, reorder priorities; the list is endless. Wishful thinking is often on the front burner and the "spirit of the season" prompts us to babble a resolution to make it so.

Are such resolutions really God-honoring? Is this something that God desires us to do? How often have you heard a person seriously announce a certain resolution on January 1st and by mid-January the resolution has been embarrassingly forgotten or modified to "let you down easily?" New Year's resolutions become nothing more than wishful dreams; a few days into the year they are as permanent as a wisp of smoke.

In Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus speaks about oaths. After reading these verses we know that oath-taking is a serious matter. This section ends with: "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." And in Matthew 12:36, Jesus warns that men "will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken." In James 4:13-17 we are warned about being presumptuous: "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow! 'Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will and do this or that.' As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil."

A righteous man "keeps his oath, even when it hurts" (Psalm 15). Proverbs is full of warnings about what we say and how we say it. We read: "The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly" (Proverbs 15:2). "A man of knowledge uses words with restraint...even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and

discerning if he holds his tongue" (Proverbs 17:27-28). "A wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction" (Proverbs 16:23). Over and over again we hear the same thing, guard your mouth, think before you speak, don't be foolish in what you say.

When we speak as Christians we need to be careful what we are proposing. God takes our words seriously and so should we. In many ways it is a measure of our maturity in Christ. So in this season of oaths, resolutions and pronouncements consider the following:

1. The best desire (or even resolution) would be to make everyday a day of fellowship with the Lord in the Bible. Here is where we can learn to wish for the right things in the right way with the right attitude.

2. If we desire something to come true, make it a matter of prayer, trusting in God to give us the right words and desires. Ask others to pray for you; this will temper your desires to be biblical and serious.

3. Proverbs 16:2 tells us to "commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. James 4, as stated above, is a good passage to meditate on before we start making resolutions. We want God to be in all of our plans.

4. When we make resolutions, we are putting our word on the line. We should be very careful in doing it. If our resolution is trivial and ephemeral, it speaks poorly of our Christian witness and resolve.

5. If God, in his great mercy, gives us the desire of our hearts, let us give him the glory for it. I believe the reason that our resolutions often amount to nothing is because we speak them in on our own power, in our own way, for our own glory. Don't expect God to give us the "stick-to-it-tiveness" to make it so, for our reward will be our flesh and our sanctification will suffer for it. Perhaps God is protecting us from ourselves when our thoughtless resolutions amount to nothing but vain announcements.

This New Year, thank God for preserving and sustaining you for another year. And ask him for his will to be done in your life, that his ways would be your ways and that his thoughts would be more and more your thoughts.

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