

# I Resolve

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Has it ever struck you how often our New Year's resolutions mirror those made by the world? "I am going to eat healthy and lose weight this year!" "This year I am going to commit to exercising at least three times a week!" There are things we commit to doing and any number of things that we commit to living without, including candy, carbs, clutter, and more. The list goes on and on. Maybe the resolution has to do with our relationships. "I am going to spend more quality time with my parents (said no young person ever, but hey, maybe this is the year!)." Maybe we are going to commit to spending our money more wisely, cut down on credit card debt, or save more money every month. All of these are fine resolutions, and worth keeping. But why is it that so often, as Christians, as those who are called to be separate from the world (2 Cor. 6:17), we actually look a whole lot like the world? Maybe it's time for all us to make a resolution that is radically different from that made by the world, a resolution that no unbeliever would ever make.

In his book "Habits of Grace," David Mathis points out that "the vast majority of our lives are lived spontaneously. More than 99 percent of our decisions about this and that happen without any immediate reflection. We just act. Our lives flow from the kind of person we are—the kind of person we have become—rather than some succession of time-outs for reflection." Rarely does it take place that someone asks a question or an everyday activity takes place in our lives that we stop what we are doing, and say, "You know, I would like to take 10 or 15 minutes to think about that before responding." What happens most often is that someone cuts us off in traffic and it takes about one second for us to react. A friend at school says something that we don't like, and we have a retort on the tip of our tongue in seconds. And this happens all day long. The question is, what is shaping our responses in those situations? What are the principles that are guiding our words, thoughts, and actions in those spur-of-the-moment situations? Too often the world is our guide, and not our heavenly Father.

What does it take for our spontaneous actions to be guided by God, and not by the world, the devil, or our sinful flesh? How do we know what pleases and displeases God, and just as importantly, how do we train ourselves to act out of that knowledge? The best way to know what pleases or displeases anyone is by spending time with them. For the reader who lives at home, he or she knows what it is that pleases their father and mother. By living in close proximity with their parents, they have learned—at times the hard way—what their parents’ likes and dislikes are. And this shapes their behavior at home. A godly young person or child who wants to please their parents, knows what it is that makes them happy, and strives to do it.

So, the question is, how do we know the mind of God? Is it even possible? How do we mold our minds and our hearts, so that when we are confronted by a situation, our initial reaction is not one that is shaped by the unbelieving world, but is shaped, even unconsciously, by that which we know will please our Father in heaven? To answer negatively, if we haven’t been studying (2 Tim. 2:15, Acts 17:11), memorizing (Ps. 119:11), or meditating on God’s word (Ps. 1:2), then as events unfold around us, we would do well to be skeptical of our initial reaction. If we are spending all of our time in social media or watching the ungodly and profane television programming orchestrated by the devil, then the “wisdom” we are relying on is the wisdom of man, and of the world. To the extent that our time is spent in worldly exercises and not in reading spiritually edifying materials (starting with the Bible), then to that extent we have ignored the command of God given in Jeremiah 10:2, “Learn not the way of the heathen.” And shamefully, we too have “followed vanity, and become vain and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them” (2 Kings 17:15).

It is possible for us to know what is pleasing to God. In fact, it is our *obligation* to know what is pleasing to God, and then to do it (Jer. 11:4). The apostle Paul teaches us in Ephesians 5:10 that we are to walk as children of light, “Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.” And again, in Romans 12:2, we are admonished to “prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” To prove is to test, to

study, and to examine from the Bible what is acceptable and pleasing to God. How we do that is by sitting under faithful preaching as a member of a true church of Christ. We then discipline ourselves to be engaged in the study and memorization of the Bible<sup>1</sup>. We put away the literary trash of the world, and we read good, spiritual material that edifies. We engage in Bible study, formally through the church, but also informally with a handpicked group of fellow Christians who will challenge us, admonish us if needed, but assist us as we delve into the mysteries and truths of the Bible. We refuse to waste our time by sitting on our bed and thumbing through our phone for hours, or by endless texting or posting. We pray every night and every morning before we pick up the Bible that God would bless us in our study and memorization of his word. We meditate on the word by asking ourselves, “What is God teaching me in this section of his word? What behavior does this text reveal to be pleasing to him, and what should I start doing or stop doing?” And what starts as work, God, in his tender mercy, transforms into joy, and what starts as duty, is transformed into choice, as put so beautifully by William Cowper:

“To see the Law by Christ fulfilled  
And hear his pard’ning voice  
Transforms a slave into a child  
And duty into choice”

So, this new year go ahead and resolve to lose weight, get organized, or make new friends. But those should not be the first resolutions we make. The unbelieving world makes those resolutions. Our first resolution should be so resoundingly different that the world could not even begin to understand it, and it could go something like this: “I resolve, by the grace of God, the mercy of his Son, and through the power of his Spirit, to read, study, and meditate on his word, until I know what is pleasing to him, and then to live out of that knowledge to the glory of his great name and to the benefit of his saints.”

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<sup>1</sup> Please don’t think that Bible memorization ends with Sunday School. If that is the case, when you are faced with a temptation, you will be powerless to defend yourself, or as Donald Whitney put it in his book *Spiritual Disciplines*, “the Holy Spirit enters your mental arsenal and looks around for available weapons, but all he finds is a John 3:16, Genesis 1:1, and a Great Commission.” We must be armed with the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17).

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