

How to Make a Resolution Work

Philippians 3:12-16

INTRODUCTION

- A. This is the time of the year where we make resolutions we never really intend to keep — we're going to lose weight, we're going to exercise more, we're going to quit smoking, we're going to pay off the credit cards.
 - 1. Every year we have the best of intentions, but our resolutions are not worth the time they take nor the paper on which we write them.
 - 2. This morning, we want to think about how to make these resolutions work.
- B. Although losing weight or quitting smoking would result in much better health, we're not going to spend time learning how to lose weight or quit smoking.
 - 1. What we are going to say would apply to those resolutions, but I want to challenge us to make more important resolutions — more time in Scripture, more time in prayer, more time in worship, a closer walk Christ.
 - 2. Let us think about how Paul made his resolutions work.

KNOW WHERE YOU ARE

- A. “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected,” v. 12; “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended,” v. 13.
 - 1. Just what had Paul not attained?
 - a. In verse 11, Paul says that he hopes to “attain to the resurrection from the dead.”
 - 1) Some want to say that here Paul is thinking about the resurrection from the dead.
 - 2) It is sometimes difficult to tell where a hard break is in Scripture, but this seems to be a case where there is a complete change in subject.
 - 3) Here Paul seems to be talking about a goal he has; something he can work for in this life.
 - b. Paul seems to be speaking here of personal holiness; notice verse 12 — “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected.” He seems to equate his attainment with perfection.
 - 2. Paul wanted to be holy, but in order to become more holy he had to understand that he was not yet fully holy.
 - a. If Paul really thought that he had already arrived and was perfectly holy, he would have, in all likelihood, sat back and have done nothing to achieve more holiness.
 - 1) Had he done so, he would have slipped further from Christ rather than staying close to him.
 - 2) Paul would have let his guard down, and he would have succumbed to the temptation of Satan.
 - b. But, Paul had a realistic understanding of himself. He knew who he was, and what he needed to be.
- B. If we are to make our resolutions work, we must know where we are.
 - 1. If we want to lose weight, we need to know how much we weigh; if we want to quit smoking, we need to know how much we are smoking.
 - 2. If we are to set spiritual resolutions, we need to know where we are spiritually.
 - a. If I'm going to walk closer with Christ, I need to know how closely I'm walking now; If I'm going to study my Bible more, I need to know how much I'm studying now.
 - b. If we do not know where we are, we need to examine ourselves to discover where we are.
 - 1) “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves” (2 Cor. 13:5).
 - 2) “Let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another” (Gal. 6:4).
 - 3. Do you know where you are? Have you examined yourself?

KNOW WHERE YOU WANT TO GO

- A. Paul knew where he wanted to go; he had a goal.
 - 1. “I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me,” v. 12.
 - a. Christ had laid hold of Paul — this, no doubt, goes back to the conversion of Saul, and probably specifically to Paul's call to be an apostle. Christ laid hold on Paul when he called him to apostleship.
 - b. Paul wanted to lay hold of that for which Christ had laid hold of him.
 - 1) This probably has reference to Paul's desire to fulfill his apostolic ministry.
 - 2) Paul had told Timothy to fulfill his ministry.
 - a) “Fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5).

- b) Likewise, here Paul is saying, “I want to fulfill my ministry. I want to be the best apostle I can be.”
- 2. Paul reached “forward to those things which are ahead,” v. 13.
 - a. This, no doubt, looks forward to those new opportunities Paul will have to fulfill his ministry: to evangelize, to establish congregations, to write Scripture.
 - b. Paul had his eye firmly planted on that goal. Instead of looking back at his failure, he looked forward to his future successes.
 - c. What will our future successes be — how much time will we spend in prayer, how much time will we spend in worship, how will we measure a closer walk with Christ?
- 3. Paul pressed “toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,” v. 14.
 - a. Here, Paul seems to have an eternal goal in mind; he is wanting the crown of life Jesus will give for him.
 - 1) In the ancient world, garlands, crowns of flowers, were given to those who won athletic competitions.
 - 2) “There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day” (2 Tim. 4:8).
 - b. Paul pressed forward to receive that goal; he put his energies into it; he worked for it.
 - c. If we want to be holy, if we want to go to heaven, we need to put our energies into it; we need to work for it.
 - 1) We are not just going to wake up one morning and have holiness. We can’t just die and go to heaven.
 - 2) We need to labor for the Lord, to press “toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”
 - d. We need to strive to reach our goal.
 - 1) “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Lk. 13:24).
 - 2) Concerning preaching the Gospel to all, Paul said, “To this end I also labor, striving according to his working which works in me mightily” (Col. 1:29).
 - 3) Let us determine to strive for our goal in this new year — to put blood, sweat, and toil into it.
- 4. If we want to go anywhere, we have to have a goal in mind.
 - a. If we plan on traveling somewhere, we need to have a destination in mind before we start off.
 - b. Likewise, we need to have a goal in mind for our Christian walk.
 - 1) What will that goal be?
 - 2) Will it be to study more, to pray more, to worship more, to walk with God more closely?
- B. In order to reach his goal, Paul had to put the past behind him — “One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind.”
 - 1. There is much discussion among the commentators as to what Paul meant- did he put his Jewish past with all its baggage behind him, or did he put failures as a Christian behind him?
 - a. It makes no difference, for we learn a valuable lesson either way.
 - b. Paul put his failures behind him, and so must we.
 - 2. We make failures as Christians, but we must not allow those failures to sidetrack our progress.
 - a. There are many who do allow their failures to sidetrack their progress.
 - 1) They blame their current behavior on what they learned as children; it’s not their fault.
 - 2) They become so overcome with guilt that they cannot concentrate on what they are currently doing. Judas became so overcome by his past that he went and hanged himself (Mt. 27:2-5).
 - b. We have come to a new year, a perfect opportunity to begin anew, to put the past behind us.
 - c. Let us put the past behind us and reach forward to new opportunities.

CONCLUSION

- A. Paul concludes this section by saying, “Therefore, let us, as many as are mature, have this mind” (v. 15).
 - 1. In other words, those of us who are mature, need to strive to work on our goals.
 - 2. Are you mature? Are you striving to work on our goals?
- B. Let us become mature. Let us strive to work on our goals.