

Keeping Your Resolutions?

Have you made any New Year's resolutions? – perhaps to eat less, exercise more, manage time and finances better, finally get organized? Are these the same resolutions you made last year, or is it just me? Despite past failures, there's something about the clean slate of a brand new year that gives us the optimism to try again, to believe we will be more successful this time following through on all our good intentions. But there's a problem.

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing... (Romans 7:18-19)

Isn't that what so often happens to New Year's resolutions? We really do desire to make positive changes, and we may even start well. Then before we know it, we've slipped back into old habits. We've skipped our scheduled workout, eaten the ice cream, blown the new budget, and fallen behind on our ambitious plans.

Even more important than the condition of our bodies, finances, or homes, however, is the condition of our souls. And not one of us, no matter how disciplined about other things, has the ability to fit his/her own soul for heaven. No matter how hard we try to live rightly and to please God, we will always fall short (Romans 3:23). As the apostle Paul acknowledges in today's Romans passage, even *he*, long after his conversion, still struggled against the sinful nature we all possess. Then he continues:

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! ...Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 7:24-8:2)

God doesn't abandon us to our wretched state; he provides the answer to our problem. It's not that we become perfect when we put our faith in Jesus, but our sins are likely fewer and they are all forgiven. By God's grace, our slates are wiped clean – not just once a year on January 1st but every single day! God gives us a fresh start each morning (Lamentations 3:22-23).

So keep making resolutions for positive changes, especially spiritual ones – not to prove yourself strong or worthy, but because you are thankful for God's mercy and sincerely desire to live according to his will. Then remember to pray for his help too. With God, *all* things are possible (Matthew 19:26)... even keeping resolutions.

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