

James L. Holly, M.D.

Thoughts About Things New Year's Resolutions? Yes or No! By James L. Holly, MD

A new year! A new leaf! A new start! But, didn't we do this last year, also? Hmmm, what happened to the New Year's Resolutions, which we made last year? Perhaps we should make a "vow," instead of a resolution. The Psalmist declared: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people." (Psalm 116:12-14) Vows are personal, public gifts to God, "for all of His benefits to us." Vows are our gifts to God for His gifts to us.

A "vow" means "to promise to do something for or to give something to God." It is the act of verbally consecrating one's service to God; a vow:

- Is motivated by love, not by legalism, which means a vow is made willingly and is not coerced nor forced.
- Represents a sacrifice of life, a surrender of authority over an aspect of one's life.
- All men and women who love God should make vows.
- Is spoken publicly:
- Will always be between a man and God; it will never be between two men. That's why one's wedding vow is made to God. One pledges one's love to another; one pledges one's faithful to God.
- Must be made without any mental reservation.
- And, the failure to keep a vow is sin, and must be repented of.

A vow is very serious, in fact, the taking of a vow is more serious than the making of a New Year's resolution. Why then should one make a vow instead of a resolution? The answer is found in analyzing the difference between the two.

The differences between "resolutions" and "vows":

Resolutions

- Between a man and himself
- Goal is to improve relationship between self and/or self and others

Vows

- Between man and God
- Goal is to worship and glorify God

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivated by man’s perception • Provides no power for fulfillment • Results in CONDEMNATION upon failure to success at keeping. • Failure responded to by regret and resolve to do better • Temporary • Christians should avoid • Basis of a contract – a relationship between men and women, which limits their responsibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivated by God’s wisdom • God gives grace -- the desire and power – to fulfill the vow and do God’s will • Results in CONVICTION upon failure to • Failure responded to by repentance and renewal of love for God • Permanent (although a vow may be for a specified time limited, i.e., a fast) • Christians should embrace • Basis of a covenant – a relationship between men and women or men and God with unlimited responsibility |
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Resolutions set men and women up for failure; vows empower them to succeed. God gives men and women grace – power and authority – to fulfill the responsibilities of vows; but they are on their own to fulfill the promises of resolutions. However, before undertaking a vow, one must understand that while a personal vow is not a commandment from God, once undertaken, a vow has the same authority as a commandment in the life of the one who took the vow.

Legalism results when someone tries to impose the responsibility of one’s own vow upon others. This can be avoided by understanding their similarities and differences between the two.

The similarities between “commandments” and “vows”

Commandments

Vows

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal: apply equally to all men and women whether they believe them or not • Eternal, not limited by time, and equally valid in heaven and hell • Compulsory (non-optional) • Violation of a commandment is sin • Can be imposed upon others by the community of faith • Indifference and/or neglect is sin • Based on LOGOS which is the Bible, God’s Eternal, Pre-Existent, Inerrant, Universal Word; this is the ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique: personal applications of God’s commandments in one’s own life • Permanent, last throughout time • Optional until undertaken • Violation of a vow is sin • Imposition upon others results in legalism • It is better not to vow, than to vow and not to keep the vow • Based on RHEMA, which is God’s personal, private, particular Word spoken to the mind and spirit of a believer. RHEMA is totally subordinate to and dependent upon the LOGOS |
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- Unaffected by circumstances, conflicts or confusion
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The Good News about vows, like the Good News about commandments, is that the means for fulfilling both is provided by the power of God, and the means for responding to a failure in either has been provided by God. When a person fails to fulfill a resolution, they get frustrated and try to start over, but are always faced with past failures. When a person fails to fulfill a vow or breaks a commandment, all they have to do is to repent, and they not only get to “start over,” but they do so without the guilt of their failure.

This year, try a vow rather than a resolution. God’s grace will enable you to fulfill that vow. You will be strengthened and others will be challenged by your success and by God’s faithfulness.