

**Msg #150 of Scripture Beneath The Surface**  
*“New Year’s Resolutions, And Other Failures”*

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I’d like to talk about commitments. Or, maybe we should refer to them as resolutions. Whether you talk about making resolutions or making commitments, you’re still talking about making a decision to change your current behavior in some way or another. However, there really is a difference between resolutions and commitments. When you make a resolution, you’re choosing something because you’ve become resolute, you’ve become certain and determined about something. For instance, if you’ve come to the conclusion that you’re too fat, than your resolution is that you’re going to change your eating habits so that you can be skinny. You do this because you’ve decided that the fat has to go. You’ve decided to lose weight one way or another or starve yourself to death trying. A resolution is the result of a mind that has decided it will no longer waver. It will no longer waffle back and forth.

Now, commitment is a little bit different because in commitment you are actually deciding to do something about it. A resolution is a determination that a change is needed and that you are going to do something about it. But, when you become committed, it’s a decision to actually take the necessary steps along the narrow path and forever leave the broad way of destruction behind you. It’s the first step of going where you know you should go, and deciding to close the door on any alternative choices. You’ve decided you’re not going to waffle back and forth anymore, and that no matter what happens, you’re going forward with your plan and you’re not going back ever again. People make commitments all the time. They make the decision to start running the race like they know they should. However, sad to say, they most usually return to the

starting gate until such time as they once again become determined to make a change. Of course, this happens again, and again, and again, until we become frustrated beyond belief.

Well, I know that this sounds depressing, however, let's go to the Bible and see if we can at least understand the problem a little better. I'd like to read a scripture. It's found in Romans 7:18. In this portion of scripture the Apostle Paul is explaining to us that we humans have will power. We have the ability to will ourselves to do something. Yet, he explains that we will always fail. Let me read it. It says, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not."

You see, it is the flesh that makes commitment so hard. We humans make commitments all the time, but we also fail all the time. We become resolute about something and decide that something really has to be done. But then we procrastinate. We put it off for a more convenient time. This is really common, even among God's children. And actually, procrastination is nothing more than just another way to have a lack of commitment. As Paul says, we have the ability to will ourselves to do something, but we don't actually have the ability to carry it out. And the reason for this is that God is the only power in our known universe, and God is the only one who is good. It is God who makes us do good things. We may want to do good things, but we can only accomplish good things if God himself causes us to do them.

Now, I know this seems confusing, but stay with me for a few minutes and let me try to make it more clear. You see, when we make commitments to something, we are just making a decision to do something. However, if it was just that simple to make a determination and then carry it through, then the original Covenant of Law that God gave to the Children of Israel would have been sufficient. If we could actually accomplish what we wanted to accomplish, then we would be able to keep the whole Law perfectly. But that's exactly what the Ten Commandments proved. They proved that no man could keep the law perfectly. In fact, through the institution of Law, we find failure. However, when there is no law, then we can't fail. We can't break a law when there is no law to break. But as soon as a law is made, then we can break that law. The Ten Commandments, as Paul wrote, were a school teacher for us. The Law taught us that our will power was good in the sense that it is good to want to do good, but also taught us that no man could actually accomplish anything at all unless it is by the power of God.

You see, God is the power. He is the Almighty God. When God says that he is all powerful, he isn't saying that he is just the greatest power. He is actually saying that he is the power, the only power. Isaiah 64:6 tells us that our own righteousness is no better than filthy rags. No matter what we do, if we do it by our own will, by our own strength, by our own might, then it isn't good. As Jesus said in Luke 18:19, "There is no one that is good except God himself." In this portion of scripture the rich young ruler had just called Jesus, Good Master, which means good teacher, or good instructor. Jesus, of course, is good, because he is God. However, Jesus made the point that there is no one, except God, who is good. This is a supremely important fact that we all need to know. Good can only be by God and from God. If we do something in our own strength, no matter how good the intention, it isn't good, and this is because we did it. The only

way anything at all is good is when God himself causes it to happen. When God moves us to goodness, then it is only good because the power that caused us to accomplish the goodness was directly from God himself.

Now, this may not seem to be that important. However, if you miss this most important concept, then you will never understand the New Covenant of Grace which replaced the old Covenant of the Law of Commandments. As I explained a couple of weeks ago, the correct definition of Grace is, divine influence. Grace is the goodness of God that works in us through the moving of God's Holy Spirit within us. The Children of Israel could not accomplish goodness by keeping the Ten Commandments, but we can accomplish goodness by allowing God's Holy Spirit to abide in us and move us to works of righteousness. It is God that does the work in us. We don't do the work ourselves. Therefore, the only credit for accomplishing anything at all goes to God. He gets the credit. We don't, because it is impossible for us humans to accomplish any goodness ourselves. When we do good, it is because God did it in us. It is because God's Spirit moved us to do works of righteousness and to speak words of truth. As Jesus said, there is no man that is good. There is only one that is good, and that is God.

So, how does this fit into the subject of New Year's resolutions or making commitments? It fits when we finally realize that in order to accomplish anything good at all we have to be moved by God's Holy Spirit. A resolution is only a determination to do good. If we make a commitment to anything we can only keep committed to our goal if God himself focuses us on it.

Once again remember what Paul said in Romans 7:18. We do have the ability to will ourselves to do something, but we don't have the ability to actually accomplish it. The only way we actually accomplish anything at all is if God himself accomplishes it for us. It is God who moves us to righteousness by his Holy Spirit. This is the way the New Covenant of Grace actually works in our life. The only thing we do is believe. It is God who then comes into our heart and abides there. He puts his Holy Spirit into our heart when we believe and his Holy Spirit then moves our hearts, and we respond to the moving of his Holy Spirit and act and speak accordingly.

Luke 11:13 tells us that God has promised the Holy Spirit to every Christian if they will just ask him for it. You see, it is the Holy Spirit that abides in us and moves us to do God's will. Sure, we do have a will, but all the will power that we can muster will not actually accomplish anything at all. We have the power to desire to do good, but we don't have the power to actually accomplish goodness. In the New Covenant of Grace, we no longer attempt to be righteous by keeping a set of laws. Yes, we do the best we can to be obedient, but to actually accomplish obedience is impossible unless it is God himself who is accomplishing it. When we enter into a relationship with God within the New Covenant of Grace, we enter into a covenant whereby obedience is finally accomplished just by being moved by God's Spirit. By this simple concept we come to realize that it is only God who is good. As humans, we fail miserably at being good. We try, but we always fail.

This is why the Old Covenant of the Ten Commandments could not bring about our righteousness, because the keeping of the Law was impossible. We have the ability to will ourselves to keep the Law, but we don't actually have the ability to accomplish it. We humans lack the power. However, it is God who is the power, and it is God who is good, therefore, the only way for mankind to accomplish goodness and righteousness is by coming under the divine influence of God himself. This divine influence is what Grace is. God accomplishes the goodness and righteousness in us by giving us his Holy Spirit which then moves us to words and actions of goodness and righteousness. Then, because it is God who accomplishes the work in us by his own Holy Spirit, then it is God who gets the credit.

And this is where the real neat concept of the Covenant of Grace fits in with New Year's resolutions. When we make a commitment to serve God more, then it is the Holy Spirit of God who must accomplish that resolution. Remember, we cannot do it in ourselves. We don't have that power. The Holy Spirit is the only one who can move us to do righteous works and good things. So, if you really want to accomplish your New Year's resolutions, if you really want to make commitments and keep them, then the answer for you is to allow God to have his way with you.

Ha! Easier said than done, you say. Well, you're absolutely right. It is easier said than done. However, it can be done, but only if you go about it in the right way, and only if you realize from the start that your success depends entirely on God himself accomplishing it for you. And, you must also realize that in order for you to be moved to works and words of righteousness, you will have to be moved by God's Holy Spirit. If you're not moved by God's Holy Spirit, then you won't accomplish anything at all.

Now, the next thing we need to understand is that once the Holy Spirit comes into us and abides in our heart, then we have to respond to whatever God's Spirit moves us to do. However, the Holy Spirit only moves us when it can move us. The Holy Spirit is in the heart of every true Christian, but in order to be a true Christian you must be led by God's Holy Spirit. And, referring to Romans 8:14, "the sons of God are those who are led of the Holy Spirit."

Now, you cannot be led by God's Spirit unless you are in agreement with God's word. God does not move you to do anything or speak anything unless it lines up perfectly with his word. The word of God must be followed perfectly or else it won't be God's perfect will. Therefore, in order to be led by God's Spirit you must have knowledge of God's word.

You see, the Holy Spirit is the liaison between God, who is Spirit, and mankind, who is flesh and blood. Humans speak earthly languages, but God is a Spirit. His language is a language of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, it is not by Hebrew, German, English, or Spanish, but Romans 8:26 tells us that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings, or sounds, which cannot be spoken by humans. Human beings are flesh and blood. The speech of our tongue and vocal chords is just the manipulation of sound waves. Sound waves are physical, not spiritual.

God is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit. To worship God in Spirit requires us to speak to God with our heart.

1 Samuel 16:7 gives us some insight into this concept. It tells us that God, who is a Spirit, doesn't look at our physical outward appearance, but looks at us by looking inside of us, by looking at our heart. It is this same concept for communicating with God. God doesn't listen to the words that come out of our mouths, but listens to the words which come out of our heart. This is why the Bible says in Romans 10:10 that it is our heart that actually believes God's word. We confess to other human beings that Jesus Christ is Lord, but when we actually pray to God, it is the Holy Spirit who makes intercession for us. And, when the Holy Spirit makes intercession, he speaks in the spirit, not in the flesh.

So, in order to be moved by the Holy Spirit, you must be in agreement with whatever the Holy Spirit moves you to do or say. If your beliefs and convictions are contrary to God, then your own spirit will rebel against God's Spirit. This, of course, brings us right back to the starting point. It is here that we need to realize that the only way to accomplish our goal of a New Year's resolution is by having God's Holy Spirit move us continually toward that goal. However, in order for the Holy Spirit to accomplish that resolution of righteousness, we must know the word of God so that we will be in agreement with whatever the Holy Spirit moves us to say or do. You will never stay focused on a goal that has no firm conviction. If you are not firmly convinced of God's word concerning your personal goal, you will sooner or later follow another word, another doctrine, which of course would be the twisted lies of Satan. Therefore, it is your ultimate conviction of truth that allows God's Holy Spirit to continuously move you toward your goal.

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If you have very little understanding of God's word, your own spirit will rebel against the truth. But then you would say, "but I'm not against God's word. I love the word of God. I want very much to live perfectly within the guidelines of God's word, as much in accord with his will as I can." Sure you do. So do I. And so does every true Christian. But just believing that Jesus Christ is Lord is not enough. In order to be very strong in the Lord, you have to be very strong in the word. And of course, a surface knowledge of scripture will only get you a very shallow success when it comes to commitments. When God's Holy Spirit moves your heart, your natural man will rebel. Every time God's Spirit moves you, Satan will be right there with his lies in order to trip you up. As a new Christian, if you can remember that far back, you get tripped up all the time. You may have the best of intentions, and you may try to use your will power, but because the word of God is still very basic to new Christians, they stumble and fall. They get tripped up by Satan's deceptive tactics.

And, here is the reason that new Christians get deceived so easily. Isaiah 28:9-10 tells us that knowledge and understanding comes just a little bit at a time. Isaiah refers to it as, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little. As we live each day of our lives, the word of God is continually planted in our hearts as we hear and read more of it. Little by little we grow in our understanding of God, but our growth comes very slowly. And, the reason it is so

slow is that we, as newborn baby Christians, are in the process of learning a great deal of information. However, as we learn, we become stronger in our convictions, and we also get stronger in our ability to recognize the lies of Satan. The more truth we have, the more we will be able to dispel the lies of Satan. It is this single most important concept that allows us to accomplish that which our heart really wants to accomplish.

Now, as it says in John 16:13, it is the Holy Spirit of God that guides us into all truth. Therefore, when God's Holy Spirit reveals his word, then we get stronger. However, the actual strength in us is the power of God himself, not our own power. The lies of Satan weaken us, but the word of God empowers us.

Now, being empowered with the word of God is by a two fold process. First, we learn truth, and second, the Holy Spirit moves us in accordance with that truth. If we really know and understand the truth, then when the Holy Spirit moves us, we will recognize that it lines up with God's word and we will hold steady in our commitment. The only thing that knocks us off the straight and narrow path is the lies of Satan. Truth is our light which lights our way so that we don't stray off the narrow path and fall into the pit of darkness. Commitment is a heart thing, but the actual accomplishment of commitment is by the knowledge of God's word to the extent that Satan will find no way to trip you up.

Now, please consider this one last thing. If you have ever had a strong commitment about anything, it was because you came to believe something strongly. You will only come to believe something strongly if you are not persuaded differently. If you waffle back and forth in what you believe, then you will also waffle back and forth in your determination. A strong commitment only comes when you become absolutely convinced that there is no other path to follow. Satan's job is to convince you otherwise. And, once again, you must come to the realization that the only thing that dispels Satan's lies is the truth of God's word. Just as your knowledge of the basic gospel of Jesus Christ brought you into the Kingdom of God, so will your knowledge of anything else bring you into your goal of accomplishing your New Year's resolution. As always, it is the truth which makes you victorious, and it is the lies which ruin your best intentions. Best intentions and determination are great attributes for a Christian, but it is the truth which will make you free.