

“Promises”

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The annual making of resolutions and promises of good conduct is now several weeks in the past, and we may venture to call attention to them. It is perhaps safe to say that without doubt all those who took New Year's Day for a time of making new resolutions have broken them by this time. But that is not at all strange, for it is the peculiar characteristic of human resolutions that they break very easily.

“You wouldn't have people stop making resolutions, would you?” some one asks. Certainly. The Lord does not ask us to make them. He has provided a better way. We do not say that promises are not good, but it makes a vast difference who makes them. If a man owes a certain sum of money, it is a good thing for him to promise to pay it, provided he has any means wherewith to pay; but if he is bankrupt his promise to pay is not worth much.

But the man who promises to live a better life is a great deal worse off than the man who promises to pay a certain sum of money, when he is bankrupt. In this case the man may earn money, and so discharge his obligation. But in man there “dwells no good thing.” He has nothing wherewith to pay, and no power to perform the good that he has promised. So all human promises to lead a different life are worthless. They are worse than worthless, for they lead people to rest satisfied with their promises, whereas if those promises were not made they might the more readily see the necessity of taking the better thing that is offered.

It is impossible for a man to live a different life with the old life that he has been living. In order to live a different life, he must have a different life. “An evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, brings forth that which is evil.” Luke 6.45. So when a man promises to do good out of the evil that is within him.

What promises, then, are of any value? The promises of God, and those only. The apostle Peter says of Jesus our Lord, that “His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be made partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” 2 Peter 1.3, 4. Here are promises that

amount to something. They are the promises of God, confirmed by an oath pledging His existence to their fulfillment.

Notice that it is the power of the Lord Jesus Christ that gives us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Then it is certain that men can add nothing to the sum. By His promises all these things become ours. When we have these promises, what is the need of making others of our own, when we have no power to make them good? Not only are our promises unnecessary, but they are harmful, because they shut out the promises of God. They imply that His promises are not sufficient. Surely no one who has any just sense of the exceeding value of the promises of God will think of supplementing them by worthless promises of his own.

Human promises can be seen in their true light only when we think of them as made to the Lord. Think of a man making a promise to the Lord, and then coming to Him and asking for favors on the strength of the good promises that he has made! Now if a promise is good for anything, this is what he ought to be able to do. If a man makes a promise to pay another man a sum of money, that is, if he gives a note, something can be raised on that note if it is good for anything. But no man would dare to come to the Lord and plead any promise that he has made. We do not ask the Lord to bless us because we have made good promises, but because He has made promises. The Lord says, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake." Isaiah 43.25

The Christian life is indeed a life. And life means growth. "He shall grow as the lily" is the Lord's statement concerning the one who is His. Lilies do not grow by resolution, but by absorbing the elements, which God gives for their growth. A resolution pertains to the future, but growth is not a thing of the future, but of the present. The Lord does not want us to tell Him what we are going to do in the future, about which we know nothing, but simply to take the growing power contained in His promises, and live by them day-by-day and hour-by-hour. The promises of God are the only hope of mankind. Why not depend on them, then, and not weaken their force by putting our own in their place?