

Resolution

The Affections of a Godly Man – Part IV

Romans 1:13

Introduction

In an episode of a comic strip, a woman is sitting at a table writing:

#9 – be nicer to other people;

#10 – eat only healthy food;

#11 – stop being so pushy;

#12 – cut down on sweets;

#13 – don't be so critical of others . . .

Her husband comes in and sits down beside her as she is writing. He asks, "New Year's resolutions?"

She replies, "It's that time of year again!"

He looks over her shoulder, reads the list, and says, "I'm impressed. Those are really good goals, but do you think you can keep all of them?"

She replies, "Why should I, these are for you!"

Then, she hands the list to him.

Wouldn't it be interesting to write resolutions for everyone else? It would probably be a perfect world. The trouble is, we write resolutions for ourselves, and we are far from perfect.

In the book of Proverbs, chapter 4, verse 26, Solomon, inspired by the Spirit, wrote,

Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established.

The Hebrew verb for "watch" actually refers to clearing the path so that you reach your destination. In other words, to make sure that you have done everything possible to move forward. Another nuance of the verb refers to actually measuring the distance of your path so that you start and arrive on

time. So, watch, or ponder, as some translations say, your path, meaning to, think it through; clear away the debris; measure the distance.

Daniel Webster defined a resolution as, "coming to an earnest decision."

Now, I might have made a new year's resolution to eat more vegetables and fewer chocolate covered doughnuts. I said, "*might have*," not "*did*". The tough part is making it past the doughnut section of the grocery store – that is the very first aisle you come to!

My wife, Marsha, and our two daughters are in Atlanta, Georgia, with Marsha's mother, who is having another round of doctor's visits and outpatient surgery. My two sons are in school, so they have stayed here with me.

My wife is afraid that, with me in charge of breakfast and supper, it is likely we will all come down with something like dysentery, like the pilgrims got on the *Mayflower*. So, she diligently prepared before she left. There are sticky notes on the cupboards that say things like, "Plenty of turkey for sandwiches," and "Eat chili before Saturday," and "Don't forget salad." She even bought already chopped lettuce, so we only have to take it out of the refrigerator and add dressing. She bought bags with stuff in them, so that all I have to do is put the meat in the bag and cook it in the oven. She thought of everything.

She has been away for three days now, and the only thing we have run out of so far, is milk and Cinnamon Toast Crunch. The Pepsi is getting low too. You did not hear any of this from me!

I happen to believe that one of the greatest revelations of character is found buried in your list of resolutions; your slate of goals; the things that drive your dreams. This is not a list of resolutions that come and go, but earnest, life-directing decisions.

Review

I have been, and am continuing to speak specifically to men, in this series on Romans, chapter 1. Truth, however, knows no boundaries of gender or age.

We have observed, thus far in the life of Paul, that the affections of a godly man determine his ultimate desires. He struggles to kneel and pray for those under his influence. In our last discussion, we discovered, through Paul's letter to the Roman believers, that a godly man desires to give the best gifts in life. These are gifts that support the cause and name of Christ, gifts that strengthen the spiritual walk of others, gifts that speak encouragement to the hearts of others, and gifts that stretch the faith of others. A godly man longs not so much for things from God, but for God Himself. This longing leads him to develop a great affection for God's purposes and God's people. We have seen all of this so far, in Paul's affectionate words to the Christians living in Rome, Italy.

An Inside-the-Heart Glimpse – Godly Incentives

Now, in the next verse of our ongoing exposition through Romans, chapter 1, we will actually discover an earnest decision of Paul's. We could call it a resolution that marked Paul's thinking, praying, and planning. It is a verse that reveals the heart of Paul and his godly incentives. Look at verse 13.

I do not want you to be unaware, brethren . . .

By the way, Paul used this phrase many times in his letters in order to emphasize something that he was about to write. He was saying, in effect, "I do not want you to be ignorant," or "I don't want you to be without knowledge," or "This is something really important that I want you to be aware of."

Paul used the phrase in:

- I Corinthians 12:1 as he explained how spiritual gifts were to build up the body of Christ;
- II Corinthians 1:8 to reveal his struggle in Asia and how God spared his life;

- II Corinthians 2:11 as he warned the believers of Satan's schemes;
- I Thessalonians 4:13 to introduce the doctrinal truth concerning the rapture of the church.

And now, in Romans, chapter 1, verse 13, Paul says, "Listen, there's something really important to me that I want you to know," as he says,

I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

Two life principles

Two life principles emerge from verse 13:

1. First, Paul's deep desire and godly affection for personal contact.
2. Secondly, Paul's godly, earnest, life-determining resolution of making a permanent impact on the lives of people.

You may remember, in verse 11, how Paul spoke, saying,

For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you . . .

And even earlier, in verse 9, Paul's affection and devotion for the believers in Rome was revealed as he wrote,

For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

"What do you really want to do with your life Paul?"

"Oh, I want to be personally involved in teaching and leading those in Rome and I want to make a permanent impact on their lives for God's glory."

Ladies and gentlemen, these are the affections of a godly man.

The principle of personal contact

1. Let us go back to the first desire of Paul, which is the principle of personal contact.

He writes, in verse 13,

... often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) ...

It is interesting to me that Paul did not say, "Listen, I'd like to come to Rome, but here's my letter. It'll do just as well, so read it and make sure you follow the directions."

No! Paul wanted personal, face-to-face contact with his spiritual children. He knew that his life would add so much to his letter.

One of the missing ingredients today, with men developing relationships with their wives and children, is personal, life-relating time.

I shared, in a previous discussion, the startling statistic that the average father spends thirty seven seconds a day interacting on a personal level with his children. Those thirty seven seconds do not include sitting beside them in the car on the way to church, sitting beside them on the couch watching the television, sitting beside them in the car taking them to school, or sitting beside them at the dining room table eating a meal. They are thirty seven seconds of face-to-face, one-on-one investment in their lives.

One of our elders told me that, when he and his family got home from church that afternoon, his little seven year old daughter, who had been in that service and heard that statistic, said to him, "Okay, Daddy, it's time now for my thirty seven seconds."

You cannot buy your way out of personal contact. You cannot give things instead of yourself. You cannot say, "Here's a lollipop, honey, now run along."

I will never forget two little girls who got off the pre-school bus at a park and came to the swings next to where I was pushing my little girl. One looked at the other, as they swung back and forth, and said to her, "Aren't you lonely?"

I wonder if her daddy will ever catch on before she is grown and gone. Thirty seven seconds, or less, will never do.

Is it not fascinating that God did not deliver the gospel to mankind by writing a series of propositions in the sky and saying, "Read this and you'll get it all"?

God did not just send propositional truth, He sent a person to us who was the Truth. And the Savior came, not to simply tell us how to live, but to show us how.

God did not send words alone, He sent the Word alive! As John, chapter 1, verse 14, says,

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory ...

Paul says, in effect, "I don't want to just mail a letter to you, I want to see you, and it happens to be an earnest decision of mine to come to Rome."

What was Paul's incentive for coming? Why risk the hardship? Why make the effort?

Ungodly incentives for serving God

There are, by the way, ungodly incentives for serving God:

- Some serve God because of family.

They are pressured and manipulated into doing something that they would rather not do because their family is watching. Perhaps you go to church and that is the only reason.

- Some serve God because their friends do.

In order to be accepted by those they admire and love, they join the ball team and play along. There is no internal motivation for the glory of God, it is just what everybody in their life seems to be doing.

- Some try appearing religious for financial gain.

There are dead men in pulpits today, even in this city. They go through the motions because it is a nice job and has a good pension, and besides, they feel good about the prospect of helping somebody. If you turn on the television, you will see other religious salesmen who are peddling religion; selling the things of God. Peter said that false teachers will make merchandise of the gospel. In other words, pay them money and watch your life be blessed; watch your faith grow; watch your health return; watch your debt disappear. Jesus is their product and they are getting rich off of selling Him to naive and deceived followers.

- Others try to live for God for the sake of forgiveness.

They try to keep a list of "do's" and "don'ts" in hopes of balancing the scales of their life with enough good deeds to counteract their sinful deeds. They regularly turn over new leaves in their lives in an attempt to earn forgiveness by God.

- Others serve God out of fear.
- Still others try to live for God for the sake of fame.

Going to church is good for your reputation; it is good for business. People look up to you because you go to church.

All of these things are ungodly motivations for living for Jesus Christ and for serving others.

Paul says, “My incentive for serving God, by coming to the believers in Rome, was not fame, fear, forgiveness, friends, or family. My incentive was fruit, spiritual fruit!”

The principle of permanent impact

2. The second incentive is the principle of permanent impact.

In the last part of verse 13, Paul says,

. . . I have planned to come to you . . . so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

There are a number of ways that fruit appears in the letters of Paul.

He wrote to the Galatian believers, in chapter 5, verses 22 and 23,

. . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

These are the qualities that are developed in the life of a believer who is submissive to the Holy Spirit.

Paul also wrote, in Romans, chapter 16, verse 5, about a certain man, named Epānetus (Επαίνετος), who, according to the King James Version, was the first fruits of Asia.

For Paul then, the word “fruit” could refer not only to those qualities that are added to a person’s character by the Spirit, but also to someone who has been added to the church by the Savior. In other words:

- Redemption by means of the Savior produces fruit. Sanctification by means of the Spirit produces fruit.
- The fruit of redemption deals with who you are. The fruit of sanctification deals with how you live.
- Through redemption you become a child of God. Through sanctification you behave like a child of God.

So, Paul’s incentive for coming to Rome was to see both things happen. On the one hand, to see the

Romans develop the fruit of the Spirit, and on the other hand, to see people come to faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

Men, you will revolutionize your life if you put into practice these two principles:

- the principle of personal contact and
- the principle of permanent impact.

This means to long for, to make an earnest resolution to see the people in your world develop the fruit of the Spirit and to see the people in your world who do not know Christ, by your testimony, place their faith in the Savior.

Most men are happy if their kids bring home good report cards, stay out of trouble, and do not embarrass the family name. That is enough for them. How many men will long for and pray for their families and believing friends to develop the fruit of the Spirit and a passion to win the world for Christ?

A Behind-the-Scene Glimpse – Frustrated Intentions

This was Paul’s longing. And we would never know Paul was frustrated in any way, if he had not slipped that little phrase into his letter that I have ignored until now. Look back at verse 13.

I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) . . .

In other words, Paul informs the church that he has put on his calendar, time and time again, this trip to Rome. However, time after time, he has had to erase it off of his itinerary.

You can almost hear him saying, “There – it happened again! I was planning to set sail for Rome this month and something else came up. Something always seems to get in the way. I long for the day I can come to you. I have nothing but godly intentions. God knows my heart. My dreams would only honor Him, if He would just make it happen!”

Now, we happen to know what Paul, at this point, does not know. He will not arrive in Rome as a pioneer, he will arrive, years later, as a prisoner. He will not come and personally build the church, he will come to Rome, bound in chains. He just does not know that yet.

If you could pull Paul over to the side of the room and say, “Hey, Paul, tell me what it’s going to be like in Rome.”

He would say what he has said in verse 13, “Oh, listen, I can’t wait to reap a harvest of souls. I can picture evangelism taking place in Nero’s palace, where a few believers are already primed and ready. I can’t wait to teach the saints. I’ve already done it in Corinth and in Ephesus, and I’ll teach in Rome like I taught in Ephesus – night and day. I can see the church gathered, Jews and Gentiles together, learning from the Scriptures about their Savior, Jesus Christ. Ministry in Rome will be absolutely unforgettable, if I can just get there. Every time I plan to leave for Rome, something else has to be done. I keep being hindered. I am longing to go. Maybe I will be able to set sail for Rome soon.”

Let me show you something else. Turn to chapter 15 and look at verses 22 through 24.

For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain – for I hope to see you in passing . . .

Wait, did we read that right? Read verse 23 again and then, continue to verse 24.

but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain – for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while

Skip to verse 28.

Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.

“Say, Paul, what do you, the great apostle, see God preparing you to accomplish?”

“Well, I see God preparing the path for me to venture out into uncharted territory – to go to Spain and bring the gospel where it’s never gone before. As soon as I finish taking this financial gift to Jerusalem, I’m setting sail for Rome, and then, on to Spain!”

Why did Paul want to go to Spain? Perhaps it was because Spain had produced men like Lucan, the poet, and Quintilian, the master of Roman oratory, and Seneca, the brilliant philosopher and prime minister of the Roman Empire. Perhaps Paul thought of this country that was producing the greatest minds of his generation, “What if the gospel could make it to Spanish soil?”

Or, perhaps it was because Spain was considered, in Paul’s day, to be the end of the world. In fact, the Roman Empire had only recently opened up territory in Spain. Paul wanted to take the gospel to the ends of the world.

He would never make it to Spain, however. The book of Acts informs us that things did not go like Paul planned for them to go. He did deliver the money to the church in Jerusalem, but, when he went to the temple, he was recognized and a crowd of people swarmed him and began to beat him. He escaped with the aid of Roman soldiers.

Thus began a series of trials before Roman authorities, as well as Jewish authorities. Eventually, having been accused of desecrating the temple, which was a crime guilty of death, he appealed to Caesar and was taken to Rome. On his voyage there, they were shipwrecked in a storm, cast up on an island, and Paul eventually, made it to Rome in chains. Life turned out differently than Paul had planned.

If I had asked you a year ago, or ten years ago, to tell me what your life was going to be like, you might have said, “Oh, let me tell you . . . let me give you my plans.”

As godly as they were, however, they did not take place.

What were your plans on your wedding day and how have they changed? When you brought that baby home from the hospital, did it turn out like you thought it would? When you arrived on that college campus; when you began your career; when you enlisted; when you became a Christian, you probably said, “Let me paint the picture for you, here’s what’s going to happen!”

Yet, things that were beyond your control, took place. People changed and circumstances that you never dreamed would occur, happened. You never made it to Spain.

Lessons God wants to teach in the midst of frustration

I want to give you four things that God wants to teach us all. This is not just for men, whom God wants to develop into godly men, but for women and young people as well. In the midst of frustrated intentions, what is God wanting to do in your life?

God wants to develop your trust in His sovereignty

1. Number one, God wants to develop your trust in His sovereignty.

As great as the apostle Paul was, and as godly a man as he was, he had no more idea what God had planned for his life then, than you do today.

God is at work and His purposes and plans will come to pass. Even in chaos, He orders the chaos to accomplish His ultimate end. Even when things are falling apart, He sovereignly arranges the way things fall to ultimately, fulfill His designs.

You might say, “I don’t understand.”

Many times we do not. When you say that God is sovereign, however, you are saying that God is not required to explain Himself.

You might say, “But I just want my dreams to come true. My intentions are godly, why can’t I just arrive there?!”

To us, arrival is everything. To God, the journey is everything.

God wants to deepen your understanding of His grace

2. Number two, God wants to deepen your understanding of His grace.

I love a story that Kent Hughes told in his commentary on Romans. It was about a little leaguer who put all of his sixty pounds into a ferocious swing and barely connected. The ball scraped by the bottom of the bat, jiggled straight back to the pitcher, who groped and fumbled it. There was still plenty of time to nail the batter at first, but the pitcher’s throw soared high over the first baseman’s head. The slugger flew on toward second base. Someone retrieved the ball and the next throw sailed wildly into left field. The hitter ran to third, puffing along with a man-sized grin. He then continued on to cross home plate and say, “That’s the first home run I ever hit.”¹

That is so much like us. None of us are home run hitters. If the truth were known, we barely make contact with the ball every once in a while. However, when we admit our weakness; when we acknowledge our inability; when we catch a glimpse of our total inability, we are then ready to catch a fresh glimpse of God’s grace at work in our lives.

God wants to prepare you for something different

3. Number three, when the best of your intentions are frustrated, God may want to prepare you for something different.

Who would have ever guessed that God did not want a missionary in Spain? Instead, He wanted a martyr in Rome. We cannot figure that out. We do not have to. We must, however, continue to follow our Lord, even when we do not understand where and how and why.

God wants to develop your character in the face of frustration

4. Finally, God wants to develop your character in the face of frustration.

Recently, I finished a portion of William Carey’s biography. Carey was the founder of modern missions and gave his life in India for the Lord.

William Carey also published the first books on science and natural history in all of India. He introduced the steam engine to India; he was the first to make indigenous paper for the nation, and he then built the largest printing press in India. He wrote gospel music in the Bengali language; he wrote the first Sanskrit dictionary, and he either translated or published the Bible in forty different Indian languages. He also pioneered the Protestant church in India.

Around 1823, when the printing and translation work was at its height, a devastating fire ravaged the hall that housed the printing press. During the day, this hall, which was two hundred feet long and fifty feet wide, had housed at least twenty staff members who worked on different translations, as well as the type-founders, compositors, pressmen, binders, and writers. The huge fire consumed Carey’s manuscripts, along with ten Bible translations. His project of the Sanskrit dictionary was now in ashes. Vast quantities of paper, fourteen fonts of Oriental types, new supplies of Hebrew, Greek, and English type, priceless dictionaries, grammars, steel punches, deeds, and account books of the property were all gone.

Carey would later write these words,

In one short evening, the labors of years are consumed. How unsearchable are the ways of God. The Lord has laid me low, that I may look more simply to Him.

Frustrated? It must have been nearly unbearable. But there was a firm conviction in the sovereignty of God.

Do I think Paul came to the end of his life with regrets? Did he say, “You know, I never did have the ministry in Rome that I wanted to have . . . and I never did make it to Spain.”

Was Paul bitter with God for refusing one of his greatest longings in life? Did Paul consider his life incomplete or unfinished?

No. In his last letter, which was his second letter to Timothy, he wrote, in chapter 4, verse 7,

. . . I have finished the course. I have kept the faith

Ladies and gentlemen, this godly man, who modeled godly manhood for us all, had made an earnest resolution. It was not so much of sailing to Rome or making it to Spain, as it was in following the Savior. He had learned that, when it comes to making plans and resolutions, arriving is not nearly as important as the journey.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/14/2001 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Kent Hughes, Romans, p. 289.