

Why Jesus Hates Our New Year's Resolutions

The short answer is because He takes them more seriously than we do.

We cover this every year during our observance of Yom Kippur and the Kol Nidrei ceremony of annulment of vows. But this teaching reaches into the New Year season, when millions imagine whatever their "ideal" is and then tether it to themselves with a promise to achieve it in the coming year.

The temptation is to "resolve" to do something - work out more, lose weight, complete that project I've been procrastinating about, get to work on time, etc. Or to *stop* doing something - like drinking or smoking.

The problem is that these resolutions include an unspoken but inevitable appeal to God, whether you believe in Him or not.

Each resolution is spiritually saying "I swear by God (or something representing Him, like the Temple or "by Heaven!" etc. to accomplish something.

i.e. [By God!] "I'm going to break that habit this year!"

God didn't ask to be brought into your imaginative projection of the future, but since you invited Him as a witness, He's going to hold you to it - to the letter!

Deuteronomy 23:21-22 - "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee."

Numbers 30:2 - "If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth."

Jesus clarified these Old Testament warnings:

Matthew 5:33-37 - "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord. But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'-- anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

The reason is that no one keeps their vows completely. according to surveys, most people abandon their New Year resolutions by Jan. 9.

Making resolutions gives us the false idea that we have some kind of control over the future.

In fact, we make vows and resolution all the time in the form of plans, expectations and goals.

James 4:13-16 - "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil."

James takes a hard line on vows, saying they lead to hypocrisy:

James 5:12 - "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation (*hypokrisis*)."

It leads to "hypocrisy" because we're projecting ourselves as being in control of our own destiny, but we're really not.

The Kol Nidrei ceremony at Yom Kippur shows us that God will forgive our vows, resolutions and plans if we confess them.

Faith rather than Vows

The proper way to view the future is by faith. Faith leads us to present every problem, desire or concern to God through prayer.

In prayer, God is not just asked to be a mere *witness* to what we plan to do in our own power. He is the agent and the power effecting the change - but according to His will, not ours.

Philippians 4:6-7 - "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Prayer even affects situations in the future that we don't even know about:

Romans 8:26 - "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Illegal Altars

In the Talmud, the rabbis took a more technical attitude toward vows, pointing out that the transaction inherent in a vow was a form of sacrifice on an illegitimate altar.

We see the Patriarchs were always building an altar and swearing an oath to God about

something. But once the Tabernacle and later the Temple became the center of Jewish worship, private altars were no longer allowed.

Leviticus 17:3-4 - "If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people."

That means making vows is tantamount to idolatry. "Whosoever makes a vow is as though he had built an unlawful alter (bama), and who fulfills it, is as though he burnt incense thereon." (Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 60b)

"Samuel said, even when one fulfills his vow, he is called wicked (B. T. Nedarim 22a,77b) On what verse is that based? 'If you cease from making vows you will be free from sin' (Deuteronomy 23:23)

R. Nathan said, "One who vows is as though he built a high place (for idolatry) and he who fulfills it is as though he sacrifices on it (B. T. Nedarim 22a)

How can we tell that something is an illegal goal or plan or expectation? If we are angry or grieved when it doesn't happen. Our emotional freak-out reveals we're worshipping a false god or depending on ourselves instead of God Himself.

So, if you want to, go ahead and quit drinking, arrive at work on time and hit the gym as much as you want.

Just don't attach an oath or a vow to it.