

I Resolve

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Key Scripture

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV) I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Sermon in One Sentence

Genuine Christian resolution is not merely a change in behavior, but a God-empowered transformation of the mind that discerns and delights in His perfect will.

Introduction

As the calendar pages turn, a familiar tradition sweeps across our society: the making of resolutions. Gyms swell with new members, healthy eating plans are launched with gusto, and promises of personal improvement echo in conversations. Yet, for all their well-intentioned beginnings, a staggering percentage of these resolutions falter, often within weeks, leaving behind a trail of discouragement and a sense of personal failure. Why do we so often find ourselves making the same resolutions year after year, only to fall short?

The problem, perhaps, lies not in the desire for change itself, but in the source and nature of that change. We often resolve to *do better* – to change our habits, our actions, our outward performance. But the Christian life, and indeed, true, lasting transformation flows from a much deeper wellspring. It isn't about mere external adjustments, but an internal renovation. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, calls us to a different kind of resolution, one that is rooted in the "mercies of God" and leads to a profound renewal of the mind.

Tonight, as we consider the phrase "I Resolve," we will turn to Romans 12:1-2, a pivotal passage that moves from theological exposition to practical exhortation. Paul challenges us not to conform to the fleeting patterns of this world, but to be truly transformed by a divine work within us. This is the bedrock of Christian resolution – a commitment not of willpower, but of surrendered worship.

Historical & Biblical Context

Paul's letter to the Romans is arguably his most systematic theological treatise, written to a church he had not yet visited. Chapters 1-11 lay out the profound doctrines of human sinfulness, God's righteousness, justification by faith, sanctification, and God's sovereign plan for Israel. This doctrinal foundation culminates in chapter 11 with a Doxology of praise to God's unsearchable wisdom. Then, seamlessly, Paul transitions in chapter 12 from "therefore... by the mercies of God" into the practical implications of these

weighty truths. He is not merely suggesting good advice; he is calling the believers in Rome, and us today, to a consistent life of worship and transformation that naturally flows from understanding all that God has done for them in Christ.

The audience, a diverse group of Jewish and Gentile believers in the heart of the Roman Empire, faced immense pressure to conform to pagan societal norms, including emperor worship, idolatry, and various moral deviations. Paul's message is a counter-cultural call to radical discipleship, urging them to resist assimilation and consciously live out their faith in a way that honors God. The "world" he refers to is not the physical creation, but the fallen, rebellious human system that stands in opposition to God's will. Thus, his call to non-conformity and transformation was (and remains) a vital, urgent command for Christian living.

Main Point I — A Sacrificial Surrender

Scripture: Romans 12:1a (ESV) I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Paul begins his exhortation with a profound appeal: "by the mercies of God." This is crucial. Our resolutions, our commitments, our very acts of worship, are not initiated by our own strength or merit, but are a direct response to the immeasurable grace and mercy God has poured out upon us. He first reminds us of the Gospel – of our redemption from sin, our justification, our adoption into His family – before he ever asks anything of us. In light of such overwhelming love, what else can we do but respond in worship?

This response takes the form of presenting our "bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." In the Old Testament, sacrifices were dead animals offered on an altar. Paul uniquely calls us to be *living* sacrifices. This means a daily, conscious, sustained commitment of our entire being – our actions, our words, our thoughts, our very physical existence – to God's service. It is a radical offering, a constant yielding of our personal desires and ambitions to His divine will, recognizing that this total surrender is not a burden, but a "spiritual worship" – a reasonable, logical, and appropriate response to His boundless mercy.

Main Point II — A Resolute Non-Conformity

Scripture: Romans 12:2a (ESV) Do not be conformed to this world...

Following the call to sacrificial surrender, Paul issues a clear command: "Do not be conformed to this world." The Greek word for "conformed" (συσχηματίζω - *syschematizō*) implies being molded or shaped by external influences, taking on the superficial patterns or outward appearance of something. Paul is warning us against passively adopting the values, priorities, philosophies, and practices of the surrounding culture simply because they are popular, convenient, or socially acceptable. The "world" here refers to the age or system hostile to God, with its fleeting fashion, superficial desires, and destructive ideologies.

This non-conformity is not about being odd for oddness' sake, or retreating into an isolated Christian bubble. Rather, it is a deliberate and conscious choice to filter everything through the lens of God's revealed truth. It means questioning cultural narratives, challenging prevalent assumptions, and refusing to let our identities and aspirations be defined by anything other than Christ. This is a difficult resolution because the world's influence is subtle, pervasive, and often attractive. It requires constant vigilance and a firm resolve to stand

apart, even when it's uncomfortable or unpopular.

Main Point III — A Radical Transformation

Scripture: Romans 12:2b (ESV) ...but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The counterpoint to non-conformity is transformation. Paul uses a powerful word here: "transformed" (μεταμορφω - *metamorpho*), from which we get our English word "metamorphosis." This is not a superficial change of outward behavior, but a deep, fundamental, internal change, like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. And how does this radical transformation occur? "By the renewal of your mind." Our minds are the battleground. The way we think, what we dwell upon, how we process information, and what we believe about God, ourselves, and the world – these are the engines of our behavior.

This renewal is an ongoing process, a continuous sharpening and alignment of our thoughts with the truth of God's Word. As our minds are renewed, we become increasingly capable of "discerning what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." This isn't abstract philosophical insight; it's practical wisdom for daily living. When we resolve to allow God to transform our thinking, we unlock the ability to make choices that truly honor Him, reflecting His goodness and perfection in every aspect of our lives. This is the ultimate goal of Christian resolution – not just to *do* better, but to *be* new, truly discerning and desiring God's will.

Illustration

Consider the story of a sailor who has been navigating by a faulty compass. Every journey, no matter how carefully planned, leads him astray, for the instrument guiding his direction is flawed. He might resolve to sail harder, to check his maps more frequently, to try different routes, but his fundamental problem – the erroneous compass – remains unaddressed. His efforts, while born of good intention, are ultimately futile because his internal guidance system is compromised.

Similarly, many of our New Year's resolutions are like a sailor trying harder with a faulty compass. We resolve to change external behaviors without addressing the deeper issue of our internal navigation system – our minds. Paul tells us that true transformation isn't about sailing harder, but about recalibrating the compass, renewing the mind, so that our navigation through life is guided by God's perfect will. Only then can we truly resolve and consistently align our lives with His divine direction.

Practical Application

1. Reflect on God's Mercies: This week, spend time journaling or meditating on specific instances of God's mercy in your life. Review Romans 1-11, particularly focusing on what God has done for you in Christ. Allow this gratitude to fuel your desire for surrender.

2. Identify Worldly Conformity: Prayerfully consider one area of your life where you might be passively conforming to worldly patterns (e.g., spending habits, media consumption, conversational topics, priorities in leisure). Consciously choose to resist that conformity this week.

3. Engage in Intentional Mind Renewal: Commit to a daily practice this week of renewing your mind. This could involve memorizing a scripture verse daily, spending 15 minutes in quiet contemplation of a biblical truth, or listening to a biblically sound sermon or podcast on your commute.

4. Pray for Discernment: At the beginning of each day this week, pray specifically for God to renew your mind and empower you to discern His good, acceptable, and perfect will in the decisions you face, both big and small.

5. Seek Accountability: Share your commitment to these resolutions with a trusted Christian friend or small group member. Ask them to pray for you and hold you accountable in love.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways do you see the "mercies of God" directly motivating your desire for Christian resolution?
2. Can you identify a specific area in your life where you feel most pressured to conform to "this world"? How might resisting that conformity look practically?
3. What does "renewal of your mind" mean to you personally, and what practical steps can you take to facilitate this process daily?
4. How does discerning God's "good, acceptable, and perfect" will differ from simply following your conscience or doing what seems right to you?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your abundant mercy that calls us to a life of worship and transformation. Grant us the grace to present our entire beings as living sacrifices, yielded completely to Your will. Help us, Lord, to resist the magnetic pull of this world's patterns and, by Your Spirit, to be continually transformed through the renewal of our minds. May our deepest resolution be to know You, to love You, and to walk in Your perfect way. Amen.

Benediction

Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21 KJV adapted)