

Resolutions from Romans
A Review of Romans 12:1-8
52nd in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans
Faith Community Church – Sunday, January 7, 2007

Introduction

Jonathan Edwards was born in 1703 and was known as a pastor, author, theologian and missionary to native Americans. He is most known for his ministry in New England, and for his part in the Great Awakening in the 1730's and 1740's. Many of you have read his most famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, a sermon that God used in an extraordinary way to bring people to Christ.

As a young man, Edwards had a great interest in personal spirituality. By 1722 he had composed a list of 21 "resolutions" that were to guide his living. Through the next year he had enlarged this list to seventy, including statements like:

"Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can."

"Resolved, never, henceforward, till I die, to act as if I were in any way my own, but entirely and altogether God's."

"I frequently hear persons of old age, say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again: Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age."

Edwards lived in a day when people thought more deeply, and often recorded their thoughts. Partly because of the circumstances of our culture and partly by our own doing, it seems that our thoughts are rarely filled with the kinds of things that Edwards – and others – regularly considered. And there is no question that we are the poorer for that.

What motivated men and women like Jonathan Edwards was a desire to live a life that brought glory to God. And that is a model worth following. It is therefore very appropriate for us to ask, as we begin this new year, what spiritual purposes govern the way we plan to live in 2007?

I want to turn our attention back to the passage we spent the entire fall studying, Romans 12:1-8. I would like to suggest that out of this passage we can suggest five good resolutions – goals – for our lives, and then I would like to tell you why they are so important. Let me encourage you to follow along in your Bible and to use the note sheet as we examine this passage.

Five Resolutions from Romans for 2007

1. I will regularly remind myself of the mercy God has shown to me in Christ.

If you are a Christian, it is because God has shown you mercy. As we have gone through Romans we've seen that God has shown us mercy in making us aware of our need and in bringing us to faith in Christ in order to make us right with him. Not only that, God has graciously given us his Spirit so that we are empowered to live lives that please him.

What is the value of reminding ourselves of God's mercy to us. It is clear from what Paul says in verse 1 that knowing what he has done for us is a motivating factor. It governs our responses, sets direction for us, helps us to understand who we are and why we are here. And regularly reminding ourselves of his mercy to us in Christ will help us live lives that are focused in a God-ward direction.

What are some ways that we can do this? Let me suggest a few things:

- Express thanks to God often for your salvation.
- Think about the circumstances in which you came to know Christ, and discern God's hand in those circumstances.
- Engage your mind in worship. Sing when we sing, pray when we pray, learn as we study, and grow in your understanding of God's grace. That is the focus of one of Paul's prayers for his churches. (Colossians 1:9-14)

2. I will strengthen my commitment to live under God's rule.

Paul tells us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (vs. 1). When we looked at this passage some months ago we noted that what Paul is telling us is that we have a responsibility to regard ourselves as servants of God. Therefore our agenda is not pursued as if God does not exist, but we look at life from the perspective that we follow his agenda.

This is a basic mindset that we need to have, and we need to recognize that it goes against everything that our culture tells us. Everywhere you look we are surrounded by messages that encourage us to our own fulfillment and our own happiness. And maybe doing a little good for other people if it doesn't get in the way of our own agenda. But you won't be hearing "do what pleases God" from Oprah or Dr. Phil. Yet that is why we are here.

How we go about doing this relates to the next resolution or commitment:

3. I will regularly take time to renew my mind through Scripture so that I can discern God's best for my life.

In verse 2 Paul sets up two sides – the side of "this world" and the side of "God's will." We will either be conformed to – meaning following the patterns of our natural inclinations and of the culture that naturally drags us along – the world or be transformed so that we live in the realm of God's will.

Remember that the term "the world" refers to a way of living and thinking that rejects God's authority. Paul is not advocating that we live some kind of ascetic lifestyle, but that we live thoughtfully by knowing Scripture well enough that it provides a guide for us, so that we can better discern right from wrong.

Let me suggest some ways of renewing our minds through Scripture:

- Try to read a passage of Scripture at least several days each week, if not every day. Read through a book of the Bible rather than jumping around.
- Ask two questions: What does the passage tell me about God? How does this affect how I act or think?
- Take notes on Sunday and review them mid-week. You can get a pretty close approximation to what I am saying on our website, so you can download that and print it off.
- Re-learn how to read. There are great resources available that can help you in your growth. And a lot of them are free.

4. I will resist the pull toward isolation and embrace God's call to community.

Verses 3-5 explain the Church.

My wish is that everyone who is a part of Faith Church came each Sunday. If that were true we would have 75 to 100 more people here this morning. Because on a given week 25% of us don't show up for one reason or another. My wish is that instead of going home you would give one more hour to spend a few minutes having coffee and getting to meet people, and then staying for Sunday School. My wish is that every adult was involved in some mid-week small group with other Christians.

Why do I want that? Because when I die and go to heaven and St. Peter opens the door, bells will go off and the PA announcer will say, "Ladies and Gentlemen – now arriving, Peter Bogert. He was the pastor of a church with a 93 percent attendance efficiency rating." And I'll get some kind of bonus coupons to cash in at the Cloudview Mall located on the west side of heaven.

I wanted to summarize in a sentence what the New Testament says about a Christian's relationship to the church. I came up with this: *The normal pattern for any follower of Christ is to be closely connected to a specific group of people in a particular geographic location that is under the direction of qualified leaders for the purpose of learning, worshipping, evangelizing, reciprocal service and being directed in spiritual growth.*

If that is an appropriate summary, then there are two things I want to point out: First, God does not provide a do-it-yourself kit. Second, if this is what the pattern is supposed to be, but it does not describe you, then you are living outside of what God intends for you to be doing.

5. I will conscientiously look for ways to use my gifts for the good of my church.

Look again at verses 6-8. God gives us each gifts and we are responsible to use them. I've tried to answer practical questions about how we know what our gifts are. There is also an insert in the bulletin that we wrote several years ago.

And this is why you have a piece of a puzzle. I'd like to ask you to do something with that. I'd like to ask that you either carry it with you or tape it to someplace where you will look at it often and when you do, that you will ask God to prosper our church and that he will provide opportunity for you to do your part in this body.

Connecting This Passage to My Life: Reasons for Making These Commitments

We're all busy and we all have numerous commitments. Why should you make these commitments? Let me give you three simple reasons:

1. This text is God's word and God expects his people to respond to what he says.
2. These commitments summarize some of the most basic parts of what it means to be a follower of Christ. None of this is Advanced Christianity. This is basic stuff.
3. As we finish the book of Romans through the next months, we will be confronted with God's standard for our behavior in some very practical areas of life. And this standards cannot be followed unless we are living within the framework that God has instructed us. Therefore if you plan on obeying the rest of Romans – a very good idea – these commitments are essential.

Will you make them, renew them, and keep them for God's glory and your good?