

MAKING RESOLUTIONS VERSUS BIBLICAL PUT-OFFS AND PUT-ONS

Man's Way Versus God's Way (Part 7)

In this series of feature articles, we have been contrasting man's way and God's way of dealing with the problems of life. So far, we have considered:

<u>Contrast</u>	<u>Man Says</u>	<u>God Says</u>
Article #1	Follow the "Latest Research"	Follow the Scriptures
Article #2	Save self	Die to self
Article #3	Live by feelings	Live a disciplined life
Article #4	You are a victim	You are responsible
Article #5	Overcome past	Focus on the present
Article #6	Fight Spiritual Forces	Trust in God's Power

In this article, we address Contrast #7: Making Resolutions versus Biblical Put-offs and Put-Ons. People worldwide have become used to making resolutions to change. These resolutions are often made at the beginning of a new year, or when someone finally sees a need to deal with what he might call "destructive habits" in his life. Usually, these resolutions are doomed to failure after a short while, leading to discouragement and frustration. In contrast, God's methodology for change is designed to be lasting and meaningful, leading to spiritual maturity.

Why do sincere resolutions fail so regularly?

When people make resolutions to change, they often focus only on "getting rid of" a habit, or only starting a new practice. There are several problems with this method for attempting change.

First, the making of resolutions is often based on opinions, feelings, or the most recent trend. The decision to change is not based on the standards and commands of the Scriptures. A person may decide to go on a very stringent diet just for the purpose of becoming thin in order to appeal to the fleshly desires of others or for self-gratification. This may increase the temptation to pride and selfishness.

Second, the focus may be only on stopping a sinful practice. This is most typical of man's way. For example, a person may recognize that he should not get drunk and should not allow himself to be controlled by alcohol. However, to concentrate merely on quitting the consumption of alcohol without taking corresponding steps of placing one's self under the control of the Holy Spirit in everyday life only deals with the symptom. It doesn't deal with the cause, which is a lack of whole-hearted obedience to the Lord.

Third, the focus may be only on starting a new righteous practice. This may ignore dealing with current broken relationships due to past sins against others.

Fourth, when people make resolutions, the emphasis is on accomplishing change in one's own strength. God's Word tells us that we can do nothing fruitful or meaningful apart from Him (*John 6:63; 15:5*). Let's address each of these three problems

Problem 1: Changes to be made cannot be based on opinions, feelings, or recent trends.

In Article #3, we addressed the importance of living according to God's commandments. God's Word is the only authority for faith and conduct. Changes to be made in one's life must be based on the standards of God's Word (*Hebrews 4:12*).

Change based on feelings often leads only to superficial change. A person may attempt to change superficially by selecting a convenient or easy solution. For example, he may buy flowers for his wife instead of asking forgiveness for sinning against her; or he may take pills to make him feel better without following the biblical mandate related to his problem.

Problem 2: The focus cannot be only on stopping a sinful practice.

When people make resolutions, many times the changes are focused only on putting off the old practices. We are all familiar with the situation where a parent tells his child, "Now you stop that, right now!" The child stops, looking sheepish and guilty. Fifteen minutes later, the parent walks back in the room, and there sits the child, repeating the very thing he had been told to stop. Sadly, this scene is more common than we would like to think. In fact, the problem of repeating the very thing we know not to do is a prevalent part of many of our lives.

God's method includes both putting off sinful practices and putting on corresponding righteous practices (*Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10*). Typically, whenever God tells his children to put off a sinful practice, He prescribes a specific righteous practice to put on instead. Doing one without the other invites failure in the accomplishment of lasting, biblical change. Both put-offs and put-ons must take place simultaneously. When a sinful practice is put-off from one's life without the corresponding put-on, often the person lives in constant danger of falling back into the old practice (*see the examples concerning lying, stealing, unwholesome speech, anger, and drunkenness in Ephesians 4:25-32; 5:18*).

Problem 3: The focus cannot be only on starting a new righteous practice.

While it is true that the emphasis of Scripture is the put-on, dealing with the old sinful practice must not be ignored. Some believers justify not dealing with past sinful practices that affect their present lives, or the lives of others, by misusing the phrase 'forgetting what lies behind' in *Philippians 3:13*. Instead, the context of this passage is having no confidence in past accomplishments and paying primary attention to the upward call in Christ Jesus (see Paul's examples from his life in *Philippians 3:3-7*). In reference to past sins, you must deal with any unresolved sin. You do not eliminate a garbage heap by sprinkling perfume on it. Adding perfume only counters the odor for awhile; the basic problem remains. You must get rid of the garbage.

Problem 4: Changes cannot be made in one's own strength.

The Lord does command us to change (*Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 12:2*), but He also tells us we can only live in His strength (*John 15:5; Philippians 4:13*). You cannot walk God's way in human wisdom or in human strength. Believers are commanded to be filled with and to walk in the Spirit (*Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 5:18*). Once a person has recognized, repented of, and confessed his sins, he is simply to focus on walking in the Spirit. In *Galatians 5:16*, we are told that, as we focus on the put-on (walking in the Spirit), the put off is accomplished (not fulfilling the desires of the flesh). In other words, our attention is to be fixed on the Lord and on walking His way (*Hebrews 12:2*). We are merely to do our part as the Lord matures us into Christlikeness (*Romans 8:28-29*).

NOTE: Much of the information in this article is taken from the *Self-Confrontation* manual and its accompanying *Instructor's Guide*.