

Psalm 119:41-48,106

Making and Keeping Our Resolutions to God

I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments – v. 106

The reason I have called your attention to this section of Psalm 119 is because of the numerous *I will* statements it contains. *I will walk at liberty – v. 45; I will speak of thy testimonies – v. 46; I will delight myself in thy commandments – v. 47; My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments – v. 48.*

These verses can be taken as a sampling of statements that are found in a number of places throughout Psalm 119 that express the Psalmist's resolutions. The strongest statement of resolution is found in v. 106: *I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.* Here the Psalmist is referencing an oath or vow that he has pledged – *I have sworn* he says. You can picture the solemnity of this statement by calling to mind the oath that is put before a man about to take the witness stand in a court of law. *Do you solemnly swear* the oath begins *that the testimony you're about to give will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God?*

Here we find the Psalmist solemnly swearing, as it were. And not only solemnly swearing but then expressing his resolute determination to perform what he has solemnly sworn to – *I have sworn, and I will perform it* he says. And thus you certainly detect a strong emphasis of the seriousness and strength of his resolution – there follows the content of his resolution, the thing he has sworn and stated that he would perform – *I will keep thy righteous judgments* he says.

So we have throughout the 119th Psalm various statements of resolution made by the Psalmist. I'm reminded of Jonathan Edwards who, as a young man, also made a number of resolutions pertaining to his Christian character and conduct. On the *Desiring God* website Jonathan Edward's 70 resolutions are analyzed and categorized under a number of headings including: Overall life mission; Good works; Time management; Relationships; Suffering; Character; and Spiritual Life.

I'll cite for you but one of Edward's resolutions. This is #65 of 70: *Resolved, very much to exercise myself in this all my life long, viz. with the greatest openness I am capable of, to declare my ways to God, and lay open my soul to him: all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, and every thing, and every circumstance; according to Dr. Manton's 27th Sermon on Psalm 119*

Just for your information – Thomas Manton's 27th sermon on Psalm 119 is on v. 26: *I have declared my ways and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.* I think you could say that Jonathan Edwards shared something in common with the Psalmist in making these various resolutions.

And yet – as we considered in our last study in the last section of this Psalm, the Psalmist recognizes his propensity to stray like a lost sheep. You remember the very last verse of the Psalm? – v. 176: *I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not*

forget thy commandments. There almost appears to be something rather hollow and vain about making all these resolutions because in the end the Psalmist still confesses that he's strayed like a lost sheep in spite of his resolutions to perform God's commandments.

Another scene comes to mind – this one from the New Testament. It's Peter in Mt. 26. He is boldly saying to Christ in v. 25 *Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.* Here is strong resolution made by Peter and followed by the others and yet in the end they would all flee. And so it is – that because we, as Christians, know our weaknesses – know our propensity to stray like sheep – know that no matter how boldly we may affirm our resolutions we will still find ourselves powerless to keep them – because we know these things we find ourselves asking ourselves – *what's the point? Why bother to imitate Jonathan Edwards or to imitate the Psalmist by making these kinds of resolutions.* Are we even sure they were wise in making such resolutions?

That's the subject I want to address this afternoon from the 119th Psalm. I want to trace the theme through this Psalm of:

Making and Keeping Our Resolutions Before God

Can such a thing truly be done? Is the Psalmist's example one that we can and should follow when it comes to making and keeping such resolutions? I believe we can and we should make and keep such resolutions. In my analysis of this theme I'm going to present to you a number of verses that can be classified under 3 headings: Resolutions; Dependence; and Petition or prayer. Consider with me first of all:

I. The Substance of Our Resolutions

I have sworn, and I will perform it – the Psalmist says. We do well to ask – what exactly have you sworn to, David? And what exactly are you going to perform?

Let me give some of these resolutions to you in rapid fire form and then we'll look at a few of them more closely. If you make your way through this Psalm you could say that the Psalmist pledges to do a number of things:

I will praise (v. 7); *I will keep* (v. 8); *I will meditate* (v. 16); *I will run* (v. 32) – *I will walk* (v. 45) – *I will speak* (v. 46) – *I will delight* (v. 47) – *I will rise to give thanks* (v. 62) – *I will never forget* (v. 93) – *I will have respect* (v. 117).

There they are in a nutshell – the Psalmist's resolutions to praise, keep, meditate, run, walk, speak, delight, give thanks, never forget, and have respect.

We know, of course, that these resolutions are given in close connection with the Psalmist's affection for God's word. We've seen this throughout the course of our studies and you can't help but see this by simply reading the 119th Psalm. This is a Psalm about God's word. And so that resolution I just mentioned from v. 8 *I will keep* can be cross referenced to a number of other verses which all describe various aspects of God's word:

I will keep thy statutes – v. 8; I will keep thy righteous judgments – v.106; I will keep the commandments of my God – v. 115; I will keep thy precepts – v. 134. We might do well to ask – why is it that the Psalmist is so strongly resolved to obey God’s word? Doesn’t he know that the commandments of God load us with a burden that’s too heavy to bear? Doesn’t he know that by the deeds of law shall no man be justified? Doesn’t he know that we are not under the law but under grace?

David certainly knew all these things which is one of the reasons that David is one of the main sources that Paul draws from in explaining the gospel. Why, then, these resolutions of obedience? The answer is really very simple – it was a matter of the Psalmist’s affections – vv. 127,128 *I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way; O how love I thy law – v. 97; I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love – v. 113.*

This affection for God’s word springs from a love for God himself. *I will praise thee with uprightness of heart – v. 7. At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee – v. 62.* And haven’t we seen in the course of our studies that there’s a close connection between the word of God and the God of the word? The Psalmist loves God’s precepts and commandments and statutes and testimonies not because he’s simply fallen in love with a rule book but he’s fallen in love with God himself.

And because of his affection for God he has come to regard God’s precepts not as heavy burdens too heavy to bear – listen to the resolution of v. 45 *I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.* The Psalmist sees his obedience not as an impossible task to accomplish so much as he sees it as the expression of his love for Christ. And so in that respect these resolutions are expressions of the Psalmist’s freedom.

And isn’t this how Christ teaches us to show our love to him? *If ye love me, keep my commandments – Jn. 14:15 – and a few verses later in v. 21 we read He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*

So these resolutions of obedience become the Psalmist’s pledges of love to God and so should they be our pledges of love to God and so should they be viewed as the realm of our liberty rather than obstacles to our liberty. And when we see such resolutions from the perspectives of love and liberty then it also helps us to see why the Psalmist would engage in these resolutions with all his heart. *I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart – v. 69.* This also explains why the Psalmist would swear to these resolutions and then follow his oath with his declaration – *I have sworn and I will perform it – our text says and the reason he has sworn and will strive to perform it is because of his love to God and to Christ – a love that springs from his awareness of God’s love for him.*

So we have resolutions that pertain to the broad category of obedience. Could I point out that we also have resolutions that pertain to worship or devotion. *I will praise thee with uprightness of heart – v. 7.* Isn’t that a resolution that pertains to worship or devotion? *I will meditate in thy precepts – v. 15* and this instance I think meditation must be viewed as

a form of communion with God. Meditation is not simply thinking on rules and how they might apply – that’s a part of it but the practice goes beyond that. Meditation is contemplation which leads to praise and prayer and the thing to note regarding many of these resolutions is that they are being given to God himself. *I will praise thee – I will keep thy statutes – I will meditate in thy precepts.* Do you see how in each case the Psalmist is speaking to God? It’s in the course of his devotion to God and worship of God that he’s expressing many of these resolutions.

And doesn’t his example teach you, then, that it’s good and desirable to take your resolutions right to God. This is what’s taking place in the words of our text which, as I’ve already stated, is the strongest statement of resolution in the Psalm. Notice that it’s in his devotions, so to speak, that he makes this resolution – *I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.* Do you see how this very strong and solemn resolution is addressed directly to God?

Now I know that in the back of our minds there is still this nagging voice that says – yes, he’s speaking to God and he’s pledging himself so strongly in his devotion to God – but has he forgotten that in the end he’ll honestly have to confess that he’s gone astray like a lost sheep? Should we make such strong resolutions knowing what we know about ourselves?

When you stop and think about that kind of approach to God regarding resolutions then I think you’ll see that asking such a question is a little bit like asking – should I really try to seek God with all my heart? Should I really try to love him that strongly when I know that there’s still this sinful nature within me that will pull me down?

When you pose the question that way then it hardly makes sense not to pledge ourselves with all our hearts to love God. We are still vulnerable to sin – we do still struggle against the old nature – we are aware that the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh but the right response to that conflict is not to yield to the notion that half-heartedness will be your portion but instead to follow the Psalmist’s example when the times of failure come. Listen to the response of the Psalmist to his failures in v. 136: *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.*

Don’t let sin weaken your resolutions for obedience and devotion to God but instead go ahead and let your heart be broken over your sin – the stronger your resolution, the stronger your heart-break and that’s how it should be and that will certainly show God and show yourself that you don’t accept your sin – you despise and hate your sin and it can and should break your heart when you sin and fall short of your resolutions.

Let me point out before I leave this matter of resolutions as they relate to devotion to God that the resolution to delight in God and in God’s ways also comes under this heading. *I will delight myself in thy statutes – v. 16 I will not forget thy word.* These two resolutions go hand in hand – i.e. the best way to keep from forgetting is to delight in something. You never forget something that you delight in. And then there’s also v. 47 *And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.*

Do you see from these verses how our resolutions spring from our delight and our affections? When viewed this way our resolutions will not seem like heavy burdens that we strap to ourselves – they will seem, rather, like natural and spontaneous expressions of our hearts. And when your hearts are filled with Christ’s love then your testimony and resolution will be the same as the Psalmist’s when he says in v. 32 *I will run the way of thy commandments*. You don’t run when you’re under a heavy burden but you do run when your heart is filled to overflowing.

So we’ve seen something of the substance of the Psalmist’s resolutions. I’ve divided them into two categories – obedience and devotion. We could go much further in the content of these resolutions but I’ve already robbed myself of some of the time I want to devote to my next point. You remember I said that on this subject of resolution there are three headings – resolution, dependence, and petition. We’ve covered resolution. Let me move on now to the dependence category by calling you to consider with me:

II. Our Dependence in Our Resolutions

I have sworn, and I will perform it the Psalmist says in our text. We see a pretty strong resolution in those words but we also see in the course of this Psalm that the Psalmist was not so foolish as to think that he could keep such resolutions in his own strength. He certainly recognized that certain things had to happen that only God could make happen if he was going to honor his oath and his resolutions.

So we must look at those things that have to happen as they relate to our resolutions. Listen to the words of v. 5 *O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!* Do you see the Psalmist’s sense of dependence? This is not now a statement of resolution but a statement of passive helplessness. He needs the Lord to direct him.

A few verses later in that same opening section of the Psalm we have the Psalmist’s first resolution but I want you to note now that in this resolution there is also an expression of something that has to happen in order for the Psalmist to keep it. *I will praise thee with uprightness of heart* there’s the resolution – now listen to what has to happen in order for this resolution to be kept – *I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments*. Do you see how keeping resolutions is closely connected to the learning process.

But the matter of dependence runs even deeper than that. You may remember a couple of studies ago when we looked at the section called RESH which begins in v. 153. In that section we noted the emphasis of a word that occurs in a number of other verses but occurs preeminently in that section – it is that word *quicken*. *Quicken me according to thy word* – v. 154; *Quicken me according to thy judgments* – v. 156; *Quicken me according to thy lovingkindness* – v. 159.

These are certainly verses that demonstrate dependence. If we’re going to keep our resolutions then we must be quickened, or revived, or made alive. You see the things that are starting to pile up now that show the Psalmist’s recognition of his dependence? He’s

dependent on God to direct him and he's dependent on God to teach him and he's dependent on God to quicken him.

In a similar vein – he's dependent on God to control his heart. *Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness* – v. 36. And then there's the words of dependence found in v. 117 *Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually*. Here the *I will* statement of the verse may be viewed not so much as resolution as result. *Hold me up, Lord* and the result will be that I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.

Order my steps in thy word v. 133 – there's another verse that demonstrates dependence. The second part of the verse also shows dependence when it says *Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me*. You begin to see, by now, I hope, that the Psalmist's resolutions are not made with any sense that the mere power of his resolution will suffice to see the matters through. He makes strong resolutions but he also shows complete dependence upon God.

What does the Psalmist need, then, in order to carry out these resolutions? He needs his ways to be directed (v. 5), his eyes to be opened (v. 18), his soul to be quickened, his heart to be inclined, his steps to be ordered – in addition to these things he needs his way to be made (v. 35), he needs for God to hold him up (v.117), he needs for God's hand to help him (v. 173) and he needs for God to seek him and find him when he strays like a lost sheep (v. 176).

So you find both of these ideas running throughout this Psalm – the idea of resolution and the idea of dependence. I think it's important for the Christian to see that the very fact that you find these two categories of verses throughout the Psalm indicates to us that there is no incompatibility between the ideas of resolution and dependence.

And here is where Christians, I'm afraid, allow themselves to accept something less than whole heartedness in their obedience and devotion. Because they know they're dependent on God they draw the wrong conclusion that they should not be resolute. Or in some cases you could say that some Christians deceive themselves into thinking that they can go forward in the power of resolution thinking that they are sufficient of themselves to keep such resolutions. They eventually will learn the futility of their ways and some of us have been down that path. We've made resolutions thinking we could keep them and then when we fall we give up being resolute.

The Psalmist shows us the proper way to make and keep our resolutions. We can make them – we should make them – they should spring from hearts of love and praise and gratitude to God. But we should make them not out of pride but with a humble recognition of our dependency on God.

There is one more category I mentioned in my introduction. I'm not going to make it a point in the sermon – I'm instead going to make it my conclusion. This last category is what you might say bridges the gap between resolution and dependence. The last category is petition – so we have resolution, dependence and petition.

You may have noticed that many of the dependence verses I cited were also petitions that the Psalmist was praying. Verse 25 – *My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.* This is his prayer in the light of his sense of dependence. *Make me to go in the path of thy commandments* – v. 35. Who’s he talking to? He’s talking to God. He’s saying in effect – *Lord, force the issue with me – I call upon thee to make me go this way. I love the way of your commandments, Lord – I desire to go this way – but I need thee, Lord to make me go this way. Just as I need thee to incline my heart unto thy testimonies* (v. 36). *I know, Lord, that if left to myself my heart will go in the direction of covetousness – don’t let my heart go in that direction, O Lord, but incline my heart to thy testimonies.*

And hold me up and order my steps and help with thine hand and seek me when I go astray.

Every one of these verses of dependence is expressed as a petition for help. And so the two things can go together – resolution and dependence. The thing that connects them is prayer – and simply the expression of prayer, but God answering prayer.

There’s a summary of this entire spiritual process that is found in the New Testament. It’s given to us by Paul in his epistle to the Philippians. In Php 2:12 *Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

What does it mean to work out your own salvation? It certainly doesn’t mean to work for your salvation – you could never do that. What it means, rather, is to put your salvation to work. That’s what the Psalmist is doing in Psalm 119 – he’s putting his salvation to work by expressing his resolutions to God. I will praise – I will keep – I will meditate – I will delight – I will run – I will speak. This is certainly a part of working out salvation.

It’s all done, of course, in dependence upon Christ. Paul makes this plain in the very next statement that occurs in Phil. 2. Right after the command to work out your own salvation he then adds in v. 13 *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* The whole thing falls back on God. He is at work. I wonder this afternoon – is he working in your life? Here’s how you can tell – If he works in you to will then you will be resolute. *I have sworn, and I will perform it* – there’s the evidence of the Spirit’s working – not a suppressing of resolution but an intensifying of resolution.

I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments – there’s the Spirit working to will and to do. If the Spirit is working in you compelling you to work out your own salvation then you will find yourself resolutely determined to follow after Christ through his word, in the knowledge that you are completely dependent upon him. This dependence doesn’t weaken your resolution but it leads you instead to seek him for help. May we indeed work out our salvation in accordance with the Spirit’s work in us. May we be strong in the faith to say *I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.*