

New Year's resolutions, a.k.a. "always reforming"

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I am a great fan of New Year's resolutions. As December turns into January, I find myself taking them pretty seriously, pondering what one or two resolutions I might make for the coming year. What is most important to me is choosing something that I can make into a habit, thereby improving my way of being in the world in some small way.

For example, one of the best resolutions I made some years back now was deciding to leave all quarters I receive in change in my car to use in parking meters. I was embarrassed by the steady stream of parking tickets I would pay through the course of a year because I didn't have what I needed for the meter. When the solution came to me I wondered why it took me so long to get it.

In this run up to New Year's I was struck by the correspondence between New Year's resolutions and the distinguishing characteristic of my branch of Christianity, Reformed Protestantism.

Our very name, "Reformed," derives from the Latin summary of our approach to the Christian life, "Reforma, semper reformanda," commonly translated, "Reformed, always being reformed."

A friend who is a Latin scholar recently commented to me that our usual English translation of this phrase actually loses one crucial grammatical nuance from the Latin: Because it's an imperative mood, it's actually a command, and better translated, "Reformed, must always be reformed." No wonder I take so to heart the cultural tradition of New Year resolutions — it is actually something I must do.

So for this year, what New Year's resolution could reform us more toward what God is yearning for us to be (and therefore what we must become)?

I resolve to do what I want my church to do: I will greet all I meet as a beloved child of God.

This is way more complicated than dropping quarters into a cup holder in my car, resolving to exercise, giving up sweets, or most of the other common resolutions I know people try or have tried myself in the past. It is also more important. It will become a habit because it is God's will for me. Through this resolution, Christ is reforming me to reflect His loving kindness.

I cherish the gift my branch of Christian faith brings to the whole in our reminder that resolutions to reform ourselves are inspired by God and a necessary spiritual discipline for everyone, individual or group. And I love the way this understanding has crept into the fabric of our culture without our particularly knowing it.

We all join the Reformed stream of Christian faith when we make New Year's resolutions, whether we know it or not.

May God bless all our resolutions this year. Happy New Year!

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