

Well, it's January 7th, which means we are all still talking about "New Year's Resolutions," but with the reality of life perhaps tempering our expectations, or at least rooting out the weak convictions. I hope you are doing well with your 2018 Goals. If there is one thing God expects of each and every one of us, every year of our lives, it is Self-Improvement in our Walk.

To help with that, I like to highlight two yearly goals: one is outward, tangible, easily measurable, and easy to preach on, and usually makes my life better.

The other is tougher, but almost always more important: it is inward, intangible, harder to measure, more difficult to preach on, but actually makes me better.

My outward one is: "*Trim the Electro Fat*" – this comes from the old sermon "*Making Time for God*" where we talk about "*Make Worship Non-Negotiable*" "*Get an Accountability Partner*" etc. One of those is trimming addiction and time absorption with my cell phone and Facebook and tech in general, for me and for my family. This is easy to preach one, requires only **Ephesians 5:15-20** and is easy to measure.

But the inward one is tougher to explain. It is not measured in minutes or known by how far I get on Candy Crush - it is in my heart, and powerful enough to affect all relationships. It can best be explained in a three-word question: **"Is it me?"**

During certain times in my life when this question was the one most needed, it was never asked. When there is conflict in the home: "It's her." When there is conflict in the church: "it's them." When it is conflict with life's challenges: "It's this world." My life has problems, and all of my relationships could be better, if I would be willing to self-evaluate, be honest with myself, and humbly assess my own role.

Illustration: Ignaz Semmelweis – A European doctor in the mid 1800's. He was an obstetrician but his clinic had a 10% mortality rate for mothers due to a terrible fever. The clinic across the way had under 4%, still not great, but much better than his. Mothers would have their children in the street, then send their kids in for care – and the mortality rate was much better on the street! He tried everything. He examined everything. He could not find out what was going on. His side, overseen by himself and medical students was way worst than across the way, where it was only run by midwives. Finally, he left town for several months and came back to see the numbers had improved. He finally was forced to ask the question he had probably not yet considered – "Is it me?" And yes, it was. He did his research on cadavers and was carrying germs to the women! After washing his hands, the mortality rate went down to nearly 1%! How many women died because he failed to see his own ignorance was the cause!?

To put it another way: I resolve to Avoid Self-Deception. Self-deception is when I convince myself that I am right, and my way is right, and if there is something wrong going on, it must be someone else. *It doesn't matter what is factually or verifiably true, nor what others see as true, since I believe it to be true.*

When I get to a place where I believe what I'm thinking is right because I am thinking it.

What I want to do must be okay because I feel good about doing it.

How I am about to say this must be the best way to say it, because I want to say it that way...

I have gotten myself in a very self-deceived and dangerous place. I. Have. Been. There.

In many of those situations, though there is fault in others or unfair things that have happened, the SOLUTION is found in my learning, or listening, or reconsidering... but that doesn't happen. There is a problem here. Someone is at fault. Things unfairly are happening. But it isn't me.

We can sometimes be like that. We see the problems. We look at everything and everyone else, but fail to stop and consider my input, the dirt on my hands, and how addressing that could change the situation. Interestingly, this SELF-EVALUATION is supposed to be how every Christian starts every week!

I Corinthians 11:28 - God has this awesome plan for Christians to have a moment of honest examination and comparison and evaluation every single week. It is not about my spouse, other church members, or the boss at work. It is about Him and who He is. And it is about me and who I am. Do we do this?

The Solution for this comes in 2 Packages today – neither of which has anything to do with anyone else. *One is found here in 1 Corinthians 11 where we are told to Examine Ourselves. The other is found in 3 New Testament passages that warn against Self-Deception.*

Firstly, note 3 critical things that should happen in side of you each and every Lord's day:

■ Remember His Majesty – v23-26

- This act alone, when done purely can destroy pride and self-exaltation.
- "Is it me?" Yes. I am the reason He had to die. And He died for me. "I'm The One"
- He is perfection and glory and pure love. He is never the problem: always the answer.

■ Examine Oneself Honestly– v27-30

- "Is it me?" Yes. Some of my choices and approaches are hurting our relationship.
- My fellowship with Him, humbly at His service, hasn't been living into the week.
- – Notice – some just hadn't even thought of this and were weak, sick, or asleep.

■ Accept God's Discipline – v31-32

- "Is it me?" Yes. I am the one who needs to make real changes. I need to be shaped.
- What others do with this event is up to them, but I accept the hand of God to change me.
- I will not lose my favor from God because I refuse to acknowledge my need to change.

When we take this humility and willingness to examine and change into every part of our week, starting at the foot of the cross, an incredible transition takes place: **we go from self-deceived to self-aware!** I become aware of my shortcomings and how important my changes are in relationships.

To put this yet another way: I resolve to be Self-Aware!

1 Corinthians 3:18 - "Is it me?" YES. I have so much to learn. I act like I always know what to do. I don't. I act like my experiences better equip me than others. It doesn't. My ignorance can be dangerous to God's people. I acknowledge I don't know the answers. But I also acknowledge that I belong to Christ and I can learn to be wise in Him! **(3:19-23)**

Galatians 6:1-5 – "Is it me?" YES. I have areas that need work. I want to help others carry their load. And I'd like to think I have life figured out and people should listen to me. And I do want to help. But I am self-aware. It's me. I need to carry my own load. And I will. And I will help others. **(6:7-10)**

James 1:22-26 – "Is it me?" YES. I have a tongue that betrays me. I want to be religious. I want to live by the Word. I want to help others and be a power for good. But then, I speak. My words do not always meet the needs of the moment and by the way – everybody doesn't need to hear what I haven't thought out. **(James 3:2,5)**

Well, it is you or is it your Savior? Who needs to make some changes today?

Is it you or is it your spouse? Is it you or is it this church? Is it you or is it your neighbor?

Who needs to LEARN MORE, who needs to WORK ON SOME AREAS... who needs to GUARD THE TONGUE.

The answer is not "them." The answer is not "both of us." Even if true, it won't help you.

What will help you is looking to JESUS (His perfection and His love)

And looking to yourself to try every day and in every way to be more like Him!