

## The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards

**Resolution 39:** Resolved, never to do anything that I so much question the lawfulness of, as that I intend, at the same time, to consider and examine afterwards, whether it be lawful or no; except I as much question the lawfulness of the omission.

Today's resolution might seem like a bit of a word salad (in full transparency, it is!), but the point of the resolution is actually fairly basic. The goal that is put forth here is to simply live in such a way that righteousness is always pursued even to the point of neglecting to do things that might be ok but are somewhat questionable.

### **Anchor Text: 1 Corinthians 8:13**

1. A primer on biblical ethics
  - a. There is often a “gray” area in biblical ethics.
  - b. There are times in which our consciences may not allow us to do that might not be harmful, but we are simply unsure.
    - i. Sometimes we are unsure because we are not well-versed in biblical instruction in that area, other times we are unsure because we don't know all of the details about the action or how things might play out
  - c. These areas of consideration put us in a momentary quandary
    - i. On the one hand, it may well be lawful for me to pursue an activity
    - ii. On the other hand, the Bible may be clear and I don't know it OR the result of my action might not be in my control
    - iii. Furthermore, it is possible that my actions might be lawful but those around me may not think so and, therefore, they may be harmed in their own walk by my liberty
  - d. Today, I want to deal with that issue
2. The biblical basis
  - a. Our passage for the day comes at the end of a relatively extended treatment of the issue of eating food that was sacrificed to idols
  - b. Paul makes it clear that this food was acceptable to eat but he also acknowledges that there were those in the church, most like who had come out of these false religions, who may see it as tainted in light of its origin
    - i. While the mature Christians would know that the idol didn't exist and the meat was provided by God and, therefore, good to eat, there were others who had not grown to this place who would inevitably be harmed by the sight of a mature brother consuming “idolatrous” meat
  - c. Please note, there was a biblical justification but that justification could not always be shared in real time! Furthermore, while the Bible was clear on the

topic, some of the individuals involved had not come to the place where their conscience was trained by the Bible and, therefore, the action was still interpreted as sin by them

3. The practical guidance

- a. What is the way forward? Some would exalt their freedom in Christ
- b. Frankly, I worry about many who do such things
  - i. Today, the issue is not so much idolatrous meat but liberty in other directions
  - ii. Liberty to consume things that others are not mature enough to enjoy
  - iii. Liberty to speak with a “serrated edge” in a manner that is not sinful but might be interpreted as such by those who are unaware of prophetic categories of speech
  - iv. Liberty to go to places that may not tempt an individual but may be interpreted by those around us as evil or, at the very least, questionable
- c. In all these things, Edwards would say that there should be resolve to avoid even the appearance of evil
  - i. Does this mean I can never enjoy things that I know to be good and available to me in Christ? No! what it means is that we should love those around us to know that some of our freedoms need to be reigned in for the good of those looking
  - ii. There is real wisdom in living with others in mind
- d. Furthermore, we must deal with the conscience inside of us!
  - i. If I am aware (cognitively speaking) that I can do something but my spirit within me is unsettled, I must labor not to sear my conscience
  - ii. While there are pursuits that are perfectly ok, if I violate what my conscience is teaching me, I risk becoming callous to the other portions of my life in which my conscience speaks.
    - 1. Stated differently, I am in no position to tell my conscience when it should or should not function which means my cognitive denial of that which it teaches me puts me on a dangerous road to ignoring my conscience in other matters of faith