The Dangers of Computer Unreality

Is there a biblical warrant for personal resolutions? Something very close is the biblical concept of making and keeping vows. "Make your *vows* to the LORD your God, and perform them" (Psalm 76:11, RSV, emphasis added). Like everything else valuable, this can be abused and turned into presumptuous negotiation with the Almighty. But it does not have to be that.

One can look into one's own heart and see the weaknesses of the flesh and say to God: "I know that, left to myself, I will make a mess of my life. I do not presume to have the ability in myself to keep promises or vows that I make to you. I thank you for the biblical promise that you will put reverence in my heart to keep me from leaving you (Jeremiah 32:40), and that you will work in me what is pleasing in your sight (Hebrews 13:21). I believe that one small means you have ordained to keep me from sin is the making of vows. Please, show me when this would be fitting, and grant me the grace to do what I promise."

Here are five computer dangers and five resolutions (or vows) that we all might do well to make.

1. **DANGER**: The hook of constant curiosity

Personal computers offer a never-ending possibility for discovery. Even the basic environment of Windows can consume hours and days and weeks of curious punching and experimenting. Color schemes, layouts, screensavers, shortcuts, icons, file-managing, calculators, clocks, calendars. Then there are the endless software applications consuming weeks of your time as they lure you into their intricacies. All this is very deceptive, giving the illusion of power and effectiveness, but leaving you with a feeling of emptiness and nervousness at the end of the day.

RESOLUTION: I will strictly limit my experimental time on the computer and devote myself more to truth than to technique.

2. **DANGER**: The empty world of virtual (un)reality

How sad to see brilliant, creative people pouring hours and days of their lives into creating cities and armies and adventures that have no connection with reality. We have one life to live. All our powers are given to us by the real God for the real world leading to a real heaven and real hell.

RESOLUTION: I will spend my constructive, creative energy not in the unreality of "virtual reality," but in the reality of the real world.

3. **DANGER**: "Personal" relations with my PC

The Dangers continued

Like no other invention, the personal computer comes closest to being like a person. You can play games with it. There are programs that will dialogue with you about your personality. It will talk to you. It will always be there for you. It is smarter than your dog. The great danger here is that we really become comfortable with this manageable electronic "person," and gradually drift away from the unpredictable, frustrating, sometimes painful dealings with human persons.

RESOLUTION: I will not replace the risk of personal relationships with impersonal electronic safety.

4. **DANGER**: The risk of tryst

"Tryst \ trist \ noun: an agreement (as between lovers) to meet." Sexual affairs begin in private time together, extended conversation, and the sharing of soul. It can now be done in the absolute seclusion of your private e-mail screen name. It can be immediate and "live," or delayed and "recorded." You can think that "it's just nothing" – until he or she shows up in town. It has happened already too many times.

RESOLUTION: I will not cultivate a one-on-one relationship with a person of the opposite sex other than my spouse. If I am single, I will not cultivate such a relationship with another person's spouse.

5. **DANGER**: PC Porn

More insidious than X-rated videos, we can now not only watch, but join the perversity in the privacy of our own den. Interactive porn will allow you to "do it" or make them "do it" with your mouse. I have never seen it. Nor do I ever intend to. It kills the spirit. It drives God away. It depersonalizes people. It quenches prayer. It blanks out the Bible. It cheapens the soul. It destroys spiritual power. It defiles everything.

RESOLUTION: I will never open any program for sexual stimulation, nor purchase or download anything pornographic.

Computers and the Internet and e-mail are remarkable gifts of God. Yes, they are threats to our schedules and hearts and families – as is the telephone and television and radio and a hundred handheld electronic games. All God's gifts can be made idols and even weapons of rebellion against the Giver. But they need not be.

Instead we should ask with the psalmist, "What shall I render the LORD for all His benefits toward me?" (Psalm 116:12). And we should answer, as he does, "I shall lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the LORD. I shall pay my vows to the LORD" (Psalm 116:13-14). In other words, when God helps us - as he does every moment of every day - we will not repay him with wage-labor to even our accounts; but we will (again and again) lift up an empty cup of need and call on him to fill it. And with that fresh gift of grace we will keep our resolutions. Not in our strength. But in the "cup-filling" strength of God. Sit before your computer. Make your vows. And lift your cup.

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