

# As It Is Written

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*Hell is full of good intentions ..."*  
-- St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Here is the third and last of the articles dealing with good intentions. This month we examine two parables, Jesus' parable of the Two Sons. As it is written (Matt 21:28-32), Jesus asks,

*<sup>28</sup>"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' <sup>29</sup>" 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. <sup>30</sup>"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. <sup>31</sup>"Which of the two followed his father's will?"*

*"The first," they answered".*

In this case, the teaching is that God does not look at the motivation behind one's obedience. Intending to obey but not following through is still disobedience. Likewise, not wanting to obey but obeying nevertheless is counted by Jesus as being faithful to the father. In other words, intention, good or bad, is not part of the divine calculus when judging faithfulness.

A related text is Peter's three denials of his relationship with Jesus. First, Peter insists vehemently he would never, ever deny his commitment to Jesus as LORD. We have no reason to believe that Peter's intention was anything other than sincere. Nevertheless, when tested, he fails utterly. The Gospel writer is revealing something to us about the relationship between intention and fulfillment, especially the irrelevance of the former and the importance of the latter.

In part, the Bible reveals to us that living up to our promises, not intentions, are the measure by which faith is measured<sup>1</sup>. Peter manifestly failed to live up to his promise *unfaithful* to his promise to Jesus. Peter's earnest, heartfelt intention notwithstanding, Jesus judged him as faithless and did not forgive him until he had repented and affirmed his faith in Christ three times!

Now, go and study

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, elsewhere Jesus teaches that doing the Father's will when your feelings would have you do otherwise is to your greater credit (see, for example, Matt 5:46).