

Reactions

IF WE CAN SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF REACTIONS, WE WILL SOLVE MORE THAN HALF THE PROBLEMS OF OUR LIFE.

What are reactions? Why are they so important?

The simple truth of the matter is that we react more than we act. We do not so much initiate things, but we do feel the effects of what others do and we react. Many of us have been disciples for years but still do not know what our Master demands of us in our reactions. As a result, our reactions are still basically wrong. When something disturbing happens we reason (Am I right?), or argue, or talk about the Law — defining righteousness and demanding JUSTICE! We don't see what justice is. We don't know the objective word so we react according to our subjective feelings, or at best according to the righteousness of the law, just like Gentiles (unbelievers).

Mt 5:38-48

What did our Master mean when He said, "You shall know them by their fruit"? Does a vine produce grapes by conscious effort? He was talking about unconscious deeds. These are what comes forth from a person's spirit — his reactions. Even in the judgment of the sheep and goats (Mt 25:34-40) the righteous and the unrighteous alike will both say, "When did we do that?" They just reacted to the situation — they saw the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, captive stranger and their hearts went out to them . . . or else they closed their hearts against them.

THE BAROMETER OF YOUR HEART IS YOUR REACTIONS. This does not mean that we judge each other by our performance. King David had a heart for God if there ever was one and he fell and fell and failed and sinned. Our heart is not our performance — our heart is who we really are! If we walk around being humble and soft-spoken and thinking how much better we are than others we are really arrogant. If we act in arrogance and are deeply stricken at our own behavior and repent, then we are really humble. We know how we react. (Is it a stony heart or a new covenant heart?)

As disciples we do not have the liberty to react as we please. We must be under the control of God.

1 Cor 6:19-20

2 Cor 5:14-15

IF WE DEPEND ON GOD, THEN IT IS HIS LIFE WITHIN US THAT REACTS. An old covenant reaction is, "If you do it to me, I'll do it to you." The new covenant says, "Do not resist an evil person."

Mt 5:38-42

The left cheek, the cloak, and the extra mile are spiritual reactions. The right cheek, the shirt, and the first mile are man's works. (We can go that far on our own steam.)

Verse 45 — Our Father in heaven is constant in His reaction: He loves those who love Him and He loves those who hate Him.

Verse 48 — We must be like God in our reactions. We don't just react in the reasonable way, the right way, or the good way. "Taking your shirt" represents the most basic of our possessions, that which is closest to us, being seized. "Slapping your cheek" represents disgrace (Romans and Jews alike would rather die than have their cheek slapped). "Forcing you to go a mile" represents our will being violated. (Jews were forced by law to carry a Roman soldier's baggage for one mile.) It is neither reasonable, right, nor good that people treat us in this manner. Reacting with, "You should not have struck me," is reasonable. Yet if people treat us badly without reason we must treat them well without reason. If someone demands my shirt, it is perfectly right for me not to give it to him. It is *my* shirt, after all. But I would be "good" if I did. In the New Covenant, however, we don't deal with rights or wrongs (the law), or with good and evil. We deal with the truth.

THE TRUTH TRANSCENDS REASON, RIGHTNESS, OR GOODNESS. WE DON'T EAT FROM THAT TREE ANY MORE. The more a child of God is persecuted, pressed, and frustrated, the higher he climbs... but it is pitiful if we fall the moment we're squeezed. It is a disgrace if we lose our temper, or argue, *or even just to try to endure it*. When we are severely

pressed against the wall that is the time for us to rise to the occasion. If we reason, we will feel ill at ease when we leave the situation (we will always be reviewing our arguments). If we murmur when something is taken, we will be uncomfortable (we will always notice the loss). But if we give our coat as well as our shirt, we will be so happy that we will leap for joy.

Verse 42 — If we refuse to lend or share we save the money, but we sacrifice the joy. To react as a disciple fills us with joy because we are delivered from our own glory or disgrace, from being rich or poor in our possessions, from our self, our self-will, and wanting our own way. The truth sets us free. Many of us have endured for years, gone through many things, and yet we have sad faces because we refused to go the extra mile and be free.

OUR MASTER'S COMMANDS ARE MORE STRICT AND UNREASONABLE
THAN THE COMMANDS OF MAN'S LAW.

Why is this?

Because He knows that the life He gives us is a transcendent life. Our life on this earth will never be a happy one unless it is transcendent, climbing high.

Why transcend? Why go beyond the natural?

Because God enlarges us through suffering. When the shirt and also the coat go again and again, we get bigger and bigger. God enlarges us. We will be bigger than our shirt and coat. Many people are as tight as the clothing they wear, bound up by the things that are dear to them. Ill treatment of just one precious garment touches them, causing them to lose their temper and their dignity. This is sometimes true even of disciples. But God has given us a big life, so we can be constantly enlarged. Man's pride is so important that we can hardly stand a few angry words. But if we can be glad when we're struck, we grow. Our will may be strong, we may tend to insist on doing things our own way, but if we willingly bend our will, we grow. Reacting by the transcendent life of God is the basic law of growth. No material thing can hold us, no disgrace or contempt will frustrate us — not even our strong wills can limit us.

If we don't do this, our households will be filled with small, uptight people, afraid to give, afraid to change our minds, to suffer, to be smitten, to be deprived of things which *we have a*

right to, to suffer disgrace, to lose our freedom. These are great losses; but not to react as God directs us is the greatest loss, because the effects are age-lasting.

What is it, then, that holds us back from depending on God and reacting according to the transcendent life that He has already given us in Messiah?

THE FEAR OF DEATH.

This is not brooding over the fact that one day your body is going to return to the dust and wondering if you are going to go to heaven after all. The fear of death is fear of losing what you have, what you take your security in, what you get your life from.

Is it your position of respect, your ability to exercise your gifts, or your belief that you are basically good and basically right almost all the time? What gives you life? The fear of death is insecurity, self-defense, not opening up to your brothers and being vulnerable, etc. You fear failure, weakness, rejection, not getting your desire (even not getting to serve God the way you think you ought to be serving Him). You do not see that that fear of yours is SIN. Our Master told you, "Fear not, Little Flock." But how can you resist that fear? Here is God's provision:

Col 3:2-4

We are in Him. We are in the Body, surrounded and insulated by the life of God, which takes abuse from us and does not pay back in kind, which loves us and forgives us. We died at our baptism. There is nothing left to lose. So we can dare to love with perfect love, and we will cast out fear with our open life and open heart. We can seek the things that are above, if we trust in Him and not ourselves (Pr 3:5-6).

Know this: If we are struck by a brother, he is giving us a great opportunity to be enlarged as a disciple, to rise higher. We ought to give thanks for an opportunity to act like our Master. Those who ill-treat us, speak evil, or make unreasonable demands lose their dignity as disciples until they repent, but they are giving us a chance to experience God's grace and they put us on spiritual ground (ground on which it is impossible to stand by our own strength).

THERE IS NO WAY FOR YOU TO CONTROL YOUR OWN REACTIONS. Even in our speech we are helpless.

James 3:8

Whatever is down in the well will come up in the bucket.

Mt 12:34-36

There is only one solution.

Pr 4:23

We can *always* pray this prayer:

Ps 139:23-24

We can (and should) pray daily that our Father would not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. But we must depend upon Him for His life to react as we should. The more this life of God in us is subjected to disgrace, loss, or difficulty, the greater is the manifestation of His power. We just live our life. We say, "Not my will, Father, but your will." This is not something too profound. The words of Mt 5-7 are one of the first teachings our Master gave, some of the first commands that the apostles heard. We don't have to be disciples for years to get this. When we first believe, we can start having these reactions. When we walk the second mile we are filled with joy. All we have to do is just react in the way that gives us joy.