

## Practical Christian Living

### Lesson 17 – Reaction and Resentment

**Key Verse:** *“Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.”* Psalm 119:165

**Our response to what someone says or does is called a "reaction." For example, someone says something nice about us and we feel good. Feeling good is our reaction. Someone says something about us that is not true and we get angry. Getting angry is also a reaction.**

We may have never thought much about our reactions, but actually they are tremendously important. In this lesson, we will see why they are so important. We will also gain some insights that will help us with our reactions.

#### Why our Reactions are Important

**The reason our reactions** are so important is that they can have long-time, and even eternal, consequences. What happens to us is not as important as our reaction to it. The thing that troubles us will pass in time, but our reactions can have eternal consequences.

A Christian man told how, as a teenager, he had been treated unfairly by his father. He said, *"My father gave me a whipping when it wasn't coming to me. Because of this, I carried resentment against my father for thirty years. Finally, one night God said to me, 'You give this thing up, or I'm through with you.' So I gave up my resentment."*

**This story illustrates the truth** that what happens to us is not as important as our reaction to it. Though the whipping may indeed have been unfair and undeserved, the physical pain from it could not have lasted very long. What did last was this man's reaction. For thirty years, he was out of fellowship with his father. For thirty years, God was unable to fully use this man. Why? Because his heart was filled with resentment. His reaction had long-time, and even eternal, consequences.

#### Right Reactions have Eternal Consequences for Good

**The story of Joseph** in the Old Testament can teach us much about reactions. Joseph was next to the youngest of Jacob's twelve sons. He was especially loved by his father. Because of this, his brothers were jealous of him and hated him.

One day Joseph told his brothers about a dream God had given him. He said to his brothers, in effect, *"I had a dream in which God showed me that one day I would rule over you, and that you would bow down to me."* This made his brothers hate him all the more.

When the opportunity came, Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt. There, through no fault of his own, he was falsely accused of attempting to seduce his master's wife. Joseph spent years in prison for a crime he did not commit. In all of this, Joseph did not become bitter or resentful.

In time, God exalted Joseph. Under Pharaoh, Joseph became ruler over all Egypt. Through wisdom given him by God, Joseph stored grain during seven years of plentiful crops. Then came a great famine over all the earth. During this time, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt, seeking food for themselves and their families. They stood before Joseph but did not recognize him.

**As prime minister of Egypt**, Joseph could have used his power to get even with his brothers. He could have thought, *"Now, I have my brothers right where I want them. I am going to make them pay for their sins. I will let them know that the dream I had about my being exalted over them was really true. I am going to show them that they cannot do what they did to me and get away with it."* Apparently no such thoughts of vengeance crossed Joseph's mind. He said to his brothers,

*"Don't be grieved nor angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life...So now it was not you who sent me here, but God." Genesis 45:5, 8*

Joseph allowed God to be in control of his reactions. He was kind and gracious to his brothers. He took care of them and their families. Joseph's reactions were right reactions, and they had eternal consequences for good.

## **Dealing with our Life Situations**

**We may not face as difficult a situation** as Joseph faced, but we are sure to receive some mistreatment. Living in a world of sinful, rebellious human beings, we should not be surprised at any unkind or unfair treatment we receive. Though such treatment may trouble us at the time, it need not have any lasting effect on our life. What is important is our reactions. They have a lasting effect upon our life and the lives of others.

**Let us look at some situations** that usually cause us to react in a wrong way and see how we can handle them in the right way. In each instance, note that the person involved was able to choose his or her reaction.

### **1 - Rudeness or discourtesy.**

**No one likes rude** or discourteous treatment. Our usual response to such treatment is to act the same way the other person has acted. This kind of reaction is displeasing to God. The Bible says that Christians are to be courteous.

**The editor of a large daily newspaper** related the following story:

I walked the other night with my friend, the Quaker, to the nearby newsstand. He bought a paper, thanked the newsboy very politely. The newsboy didn't even look up or acknowledge him.

*"A sullen fellow, isn't he?"* I commented.

*"Oh, he's that way every night,"* replied my friend.

*"Then why do you continue to be so polite to him?"* I asked.

*"Why not?"* replied my Quaker friend, *"Why should I let him decide how I am going to act?"*

### **2 - Unfair treatment.**

**Almost everyone receives unfair** treatment at some time or other. This can cause us pain and distress. Being a Christian does not mean that we are insensible to the way we are treated. But as Christians, we can **choose** what our reaction will be.

**The daughter of a high school principal** received an unfair detention (punishment). She could have created a big scene about it, or she could have held resentment in her heart. But she did neither. She

simply dismissed it saying, *"Oh, well, I've done a lot of things for which I should have gotten detentions, and I didn't. So this isn't so bad."*

**Happy is the Christian** who can handle unfair treatment as well as this girl did.

### **3 - Hurt pride.**

**When someone says something** about you that hurts your pride, you can react angrily. You can carry that hurt and resentment the rest of your life. How much better it would be if you could say with a big heart, *"So-and-so hurt my pride by what she said, but it wasn't nearly as bad as what she could have said. If she only knew me as I know myself, she could have said ten times as much and still have told the truth!"*

### **4 - Offenses.**

**It is easy to become angry** and to react wrongly when others commit offenses against us, but let us remember that we will reap what we sow. God will deal with us according to the way we deal with others. If we are kind and forgiving with them, God will be gracious and forgiving with us. If we are hard and unforgiving with others, God will be strict and exacting with us. Jesus said,

*"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matthew 6:14-15*

On one occasion, General Ogle Thorpe said proudly to John Wesley, *"I NEVER forgive!"*

*"Then I hope, sir,"* said Wesley, *"that you never sin."*

### **5 - "Jumped on" by someone.**

**When someone makes an angry** or harsh remark to us, we feel like replying in a like manner. This only makes a bad situation worse. It is much better if we can have control of ourselves and handle the situation with a soft answer.

At a round-table discussion, things became so heated that a woman flared up at the leader, *"I want you to know that I absolutely disagree with you!"*

The leader turned toward the woman, paused a moment, and with a friendly smile said, *"I like you too!"* He had control of himself. The tension was broken. The atmosphere was relieved. Later, as they went out after the meeting, the woman turned to him with a smile and said, *"I like you too!"*

**How wise this man was!** And how wise we will be to have such control over ourselves when we are "jumped on." The Bible says,

*"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Proverbs 15:1*

### **6 - Criticism.**

**Criticism is either true** or it is not true. If it is true, we need to learn from it. If it is not true, we should not let it disturb us. We can leave the matter with God, knowing that He will take care of it.

A wise man said, *"When you are in the right, you can afford to keep your temper. When you are in the wrong, you cannot afford to lose it."*

### **7 - Mistakes.**

**Everyone makes mistakes** at one time or another. Often we try to excuse ourselves or blame somebody else for our mistakes. A wrong reaction added to a mistake makes the matter that much worse. On the other hand, if we admit our mistakes and apologize correctly, God can use even our mistakes to His glory.

**Professor Stuart Blackie**, of the University of Edinburgh, was hearing a class in which one man rose with his book in the wrong hand. He began an explanation, and the professor thundered, *"Take your book in your right hand and be seated!"*

**The student held up** his right arm. It was cut off at the wrist. The great man hesitated a moment; then he went to the student and with tears streaming from his eyes, he said, *"I never knew about it. Will you forgive me?"* It ended in the conversion of that young man.

**This story was told** afterwards at a Bible conference, and after the meeting a man came forward and raised up his right arm. It ended at the wrist. He said, *"I am the man Professor Blackie led to Christ. But he never would have done it if he had not put his arm around me, and made the wrong right."*

**There is no situation in which anger is my only possible response.**

**The lesson to be learned** from these true-life stories is this: *There is no situation in which anger is my only possible response. I don't have to lose my temper. Others may say or do things that irritate me, but no one can make me lose my temper. If I get angry and lose my temper, it is because I choose to do so. I can choose to respond with patience, humor, kindness, or in some other way.*

### **Beware of Holding on to Wrong Reactions**

**The great danger of wrong reactions** is in holding on to them until they develop into deep problems. When we hold on to a wrong reaction, it becomes a resentment. If resentment is harbored, it becomes bitterness. Resentment and bitterness can destroy us.

**Let us consider** some things we should do to prevent resentment and bitterness from gaining a foothold in our life.

- Overlook offenses.

**Believers should stay** in constant fellowship with God through prayer and the reading of His Word. When we are in fellowship with God, we are able to overlook many things that otherwise might offend us.

The Bible says, *"Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble." Psalm 119:165*

It is to our credit when we restrain our anger and overlook insults. The Bible says, *"The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression." Proverbs 19:11*

- Clear up misunderstandings promptly.

**One of Satan's devices** is to promote misunderstanding between God's children. He injects a bit of deception and falsehood into a situation. The result is that people often hold things against others of which they may have never been guilty. The Bible insists that, when we have a misunderstanding with another believer, we go to him and make things right. If God's children obeyed the Lord in this, many problems among them would be eliminated.

**A missionary leader** was conducting a conference among missionaries in a foreign land. One day a missionary came to him and said, *"One of the missionaries here has something against me and I don't*

*know why.*" Soon thereafter, the other missionary came to see the leader and said the same thing about the first one. As it turned out, each one thought that the other had something against her. Both were wrong. There was really nothing between them, but Satan had put this thought into their minds and they had accepted it and were deceived.

- Reject wrong attitudes quickly.

**Sometimes we may not** be able to control our instant reaction in a given situation, but we can prevent a wrong reaction from becoming a resentment. We can choose to reject a wrong attitude.

**A Christian teacher** was walking down the sidewalk. As she walked along, she thought about something a fellow teacher had done that could have given occasion for bitterness. Suddenly she stopped and said, *"Here, this will never do! I reject this feeling of resentment right now."* Years later, as she told about this occasion, she said, *"To this day I cannot remember what the thing was all about."*

God's Word says, *"Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil."* (Ephesians 4:26-27) God is telling us here that we are not to hold on to wrong attitudes.

- Pray for the other person.

**Any time we sense** that we may be holding a wrong attitude toward someone, we should begin praying for him. Even though that person may have mistreated you, pray for him each day. And pray for yourself, that God may keep you from resentment. Jesus said,

*"...pray for those who spitefully use you." (Matthew 5:44)*

## **Our Reactions must be under Christ's Control**

**Our reactions are not determined** by what happens to us on the *outside*; they are determined by the one who is in control on the *inside*. If SELF is in control, we will react according to SELF; if Christ is in control, we will react according to His life.

As God's children, we do not have the liberty to react as we please. Our reactions must be under Christ's control. God has given Christians definite commands as to how they are to react. God's Word says,

*"See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good..." 1 Thessalonians 5:15*

In that little word *"see"* lies our responsibility. We are to see to it that we do not *"render evil for evil."* This means that we are not to try to *"get even"* with people but rather to suffer mistreatment patiently. The Lord Jesus Himself is our example. The Bible says,

*"...Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps... Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously." 1 Peter 2:21-23*

## **Our Reactions have Eternal Consequences**

**God wants us to see** the importance of our reactions. The great missionary to India, Miss Amy Carmichael, once said,

**The eternal substance** of a thing is never in the thing itself, but in the quality of our reaction toward it. If in hard times, we are kept from resentment, held in silence, and filled with inward sweetness, that is what matters.

The event that distressed us will pass from memory as a wind that passes and is gone. But what we were while the wind was blowing has eternal consequences.

**It matters little what happens to us.** The thing that really matters is how we react to what happens. May the Lord enable us to see that our reactions have eternal consequences.

**Discovered Gem:** The things that trouble us will pass in time, but our reactions have eternal consequences.

### **Questions:**

1. Our reaction to something that happens to us is really important?
2. How does God deal with us in relation to the way we deal with others?
3. What is the great danger of wrong reactions?
4. What must we do in order to prevent resentment and bitterness from gaining a foothold in our life?
5. Is it true that our reactions are determined by what happens to us on the outside? Explain
6. If SELF is in control, we will react according to SELF. True or false and explain
7. How does our reactions have long-term, and even eternal, consequences?
8. How should we handle it when someone makes an angry or harsh remark to us?
9. Are there some situations where anger is the only possible response?
10. Is it to our credit when we restrain our anger and overlook insults? Why or why not?