

REACTION OR RESENTMENT

I am thinking of reaction and resentment, or more specifically of actions and attitudes. The great question which comes to us day by day is how I act and react to the surging, billowing storms about me. Let me quote you something from the Chicago Daily News. Here is what a reporter, a secular reporter said. "I walked with my friend, a Quaker, to the news stand the other night, and he bought a paper, thanking the news boy very politely. The news boy didn't even look up or acknowledge him.

"A sullen fellow, isn't he?" I commented. "Oh, he's that way every night," shrugged my friend. "Then why do you continue to be so polite to him?" I asked. "Why not?" inquired my friend. "Why should I **let** him decide how I'm going to **act**?"

As the reporter thought about this incident later, he remembered that one important little word, **act**. "Why should I let **him** decide how I'm going to **act**?" My Quaker friend **acts** toward other people; but the most of us **react** against them. But my Quaker friend (said the reporter) has such a sense of inner balance, a peace that is lacking in most of us--he refuses to return evil for evil. My friend would no longer be in command of his own conduct if he returned evil for evil. We are told in God's Word to return good for evil. And what good sound advice that is! Nobody is unhappier than a person who is a perpetual reactor.

I could name you two persons, both Christians, who were good friends, but they had an everlasting habit of reacting in opposite directions. If one suggested some method or course of action, the other immediately would come back with the opposite. That was the way they habitually acted and reacted. They almost enjoyed being miserable, so it seemed. Their action and their reaction were both determined by the other person. You see, their centre was off balance. Their emotional gravity was not properly fixed on Christ where it belonged. The world outside determined how they reacted.

Let me ask you, my friend, is your spiritual temper raised or lowered by the conversation or social climate around you? Are you a mere creature at the mercy of your environmental circumstances? When the news boy grunts, do you grunt back? When the other person grumbles, do you feel justified in grumbling back? Does praise elate you? Does criticism depress you? so that you criticize in return? Do snubs hurt you? When your good is evil spoken of, does it rouse in you a bitter reaction? Let me ask you: "Why should you let the other person decide how you are going' to act and react?"

One of the most wicked germs in the world is that of reactionary resentment. How deadly is its work—one of the most evil things in our fallen world. Think of the discord at all levels on account of disturbed relationships. Resentment is one of the worst of enemies. It poisons people everywhere, poisons the relations between man and man, woman and woman, husband and wife, church and church, nation and nation, race and race, whether they be high or low, rich or poor, slave or master, bond or free.

And let me say that there is a popular notion that has gotten going today that the greatest differences are between the blacks and the whites. While I admit that there are serious differences on this score, the difference is largely an exaggeration. For I could prove to you, if I had the time, that there are resentments right in our schools and universities between peoples of the Far East, yes, between tribes and dialects and persons of the same colour or no colour. Remember that these bitternesses come out of the human heart whether the man be red, yellow, black or white. "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not even of your lusts that war in your members?" (James 4:1). Think of the long, burning and deep-seated resentments and reactions of those classes who had it lorded over them. With these deep-seated resentments and feuds, it is no wonder we have wars. These hidden resentments breed bitterness and depression and disease and disaster and death. Resentment kills joy, breeds suspicion and fosters self pity. How poisonous is the nature of this emotion. People will hold things against their neighbours of which their neighbours may never have been guilty. Somebody is supposed to have said something, and it may or may not be true. But that thing is taken and nursed and fondled and kept like a rotten tooth in the mouth when a little bit of open-hearted honesty could have gotten rid of it in five minutes. Instead, you insist that: "She said **this**." Perhaps it's not exactly the same thing. But you see, your grievance illustrates not the other person's tongue but your touchy nature. There may have been an element of truth in your suspicion, but wouldn't it have been better for your peace of mind if you had just dismissed it with a great big heart. Yes, and you could have said: "Oh, if she only knew me, she could have said far worse about me; she didn't say half as much as she could have said and still have told the truth." But like a silly, spoiled child, you have remembered that little mistreatment through the years to your own awful injury. Such is the terrible root of bitterness springing up whereby many maybe defiled. We may think we are justified in our resentment. But whether we are justified, our resentment is a deadly thing, and our wrong reaction does us more harm than the slander of the other man ever could have done us.

I am reminded here of how some secular leaders were once thrown together for a round-table discussion of certain matters. During the discussion, things became so heated that one lady flared up and said to this leader: "I absolutely disagree with you!" The leader turned about and said with a kind of whimsical delight: "I like you too." The air became relaxed; the atmosphere friendly. After the meeting broke up and as this lady was going out of the door, she turned around and gaily said to the leader, "I like you, too."

Mr. Borham tells the following story which illustrates the blight of resentment and unforgiveness. He says: Many years ago I visited an old man on his death bed. He was a man whom nobody liked--hard, sullen, sour. If you met him on the street, he would grunt and go on. He lived in a tumble-down old hut a way back in the bush; he spoke to nobody; and made it perfectly plain that he wished nobody to speak to him. Even children shunned him. Some said he was a hermit; some said he was a woman hater; some that he was a miser; some that he was a man with a guilty secret. But they were all wrong. The simple truth was that in his youth a companion had done him a grievous injury. "I'll remember it to my dying day." When his dying day came, he realized he had darkened his whole life. "I've gone over it by myself every

morning; I've thought of it every night," he gasped. "I've cursed him a 100 times a day. I see now that my curses have eaten out my soul; they've been like gall on my tongue and gravel in my teeth. My hate has hurt nobody but myself. But God knows, it's turned my life into hell." This reaction shadowed his life; it lent a new terror to his death; it expelled every trace of brightness and excluded every ray of hope; and at last his wrong reaction had become a grim and ghostly companion as it lay down with him in his cold and cheerless grave.

Then for my very life and eternal welfare let me during hard times of testing be kept from resentment, held in silence, and filled with inward sweetness. Let this temporal thing pass away, for my reaction will carry with it eternal consequences.

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