

Is Your Attitude Circumstantial?

By “attitude,” I mean your overall outlook on things and people- including yourself. The proverbial writer penned of mankind, “*For as he thinks within himself, so his he,*” Proverbs 23:7. What God’s wisdom seems to be telling us is that we determine not only **who** we are, but also **how** we are. Thus, “sour” people are that way because they choose to be so; and conversely, “happy” people are that way because they choose to be so. While we may accept this to be generally true of others, we often fail to see the impact of it in ourselves.

Think about this way: Do others cause you to be either happy or sad? Oh sure, there are times when others say or do things which affect all of us, at least temporarily. But is your day to day perspective determined by what someone else does? If so, you are what could be termed *reactionary*- that is, you are *reacting* to stimuli others are giving you. And unfortunately, you are allowing others to influence *who* and *how* you are. Perhaps an illustration will help.

A man paused at the door, stepped aside, and opened the door for a woman who was also approaching the door to allow her to enter first. She abruptly stopped, looked him square in the eye, and began to berate him for being a “chauvinist.” She told him that she was a mature, accomplished woman, and that she prided herself on not being “dependent” on anyone, especially a man! He was somewhat shocked, but she wasn’t finished. “Did you think me such a ‘helpless female’ or a ‘lady’ that I couldn’t even open a door for myself?” He calmly responded, “Ma’am, I opened the door for you not because of who or what you were, but because who and what I am.” She promptly stomped past by him without another word.

She was being reactionary. She allowed her feelings and attitudes to be determined by what someone else did, which she chose to perceive as an insult. He, on the other hand, acted based on who and what he chose to be. He chose to be polite, humble, and gracious because that’s *who he was*, not because of who or what someone else was, or wasn’t. Which one of these two do you suppose had a “good” day?

Now let’s get personal. Do **you** find that **your attitude** is dependent on what others do? Do you *react* to the bad attitudes and actions of others in kind, or the way Jesus commanded, “*love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you,*” Luke 6:27-28? If you’re tempted to reply, “Well I’m just not made that way,” then listen closely to what you’re thinking- that you’re not “made” that way. Who made you? God did. Doesn’t He know how to love and treat well those who despise and mistreat Him? Surely the crucifixion of Jesus provides the answer! Didn’t God make us in His own image? Absolutely, Genesis 1:26. Did He “make” you that different from Himself? Hardly! So how did you come to be a *reactionary* who bases who you are and how you conduct yourself on what others do? We all choose who we are, and how we conduct ourselves. Choose wisely!

Do you remember the account of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:1-15? Abel listened to God and acted “*by faith*” in offering His sacrifice cf. Hebrews 11:4 and Romans 10:17. Cain, on the other hand, made a sacrifice that was not according to the command, but expected God to accept it anyway (don’t ignore this lesson either). When God rejected Cain’s *faithless* sacrifice, instead of repenting and doing right, Cain “*became very angry and his countenance (facial expression/composure) fell,*” Genesis 4:5. But here’s the point: God said to Cain, “*If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? But if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it,*” Genesis 4:7. Cain chose the latter option. He chose to stew in his anger until it *mastered* him instead of the other way around, and he then killed his brother! If he had chosen “*to do right*” his attitude about himself, his situation, and others would have been very different.

We choose who we are, and how we conduct ourselves. We can chose to **act** based on who and what we are from the Word of God which we have implanted in hearts, or we can choose to **react** to who and what others are- but the choice is still ours. If you’re attitude is “sour” or “unhappy,” it is because that is how you choose to be. Fortunately, the inverse is also true! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)